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CAUTIONS & COUNSELS:-

Addressed to the Young;

ENFORCED BY ILLUSTRATIONS CHIEFLY
DRAWN FROM

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVES.

BY THE REV. ROBERT HUSTON.



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CAUTIONS & COUNSELS,

Addressed to the Young.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory Address.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS,—

IF you ask why I have taken the liberty to become your monitor in this little volume, my answer is, that the *first* command of the Chief Shepherd to Peter, when He thrice questioned him, "Lovest thou Me?" was, "Feed My lambs;" thus teaching that a tender ministerial care for the young is a duty of *primary* necessity and importance.

You will perceive that, in those Scripture narratives from which our illustrations are drawn, *vice is never commended*. The fact is merely

stated, and you are left to make your own comment; or the act is condemned, and, it may be, the punishment recorded.

Infidels and sceptics hate the Bible. The reason is obvious: it exposes their errors and sins, and foretells their doom. In producing plausible arguments to justify their dislike, they uniformly hide the real reason of their aversion. This the Bible itself reveals: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light."* It may well excite your surprise, therefore, that one of their charges against the Bible is, that "it is the most immoral book in the world." The ground of this charge is, that it mentions the faults of some whose history it records. But this is proof rather of its sterling faithfulness and honesty.

That infidelity is the fruitful source of impure morals is evident from the following compendium of

"THE UNBELIEVER'S CREED.

"I believe that there is no God, but that matter is God, and God is matter; and that it is no matter whether there is any God or no.

"I believe that the world was not made; that the world made itself; and that it had no begin-

* John iii. 20.

ning; that it will last for ever, world without end.

"I believe that man is a beast; that the soul is the body, and the body the soul; and that after death there is neither body nor soul.

"I believe that there is no religion; that natural religion is the only religion, and that all religion is unnatural.

"I believe not in Moses; I believe in the first philosophy. I believe not the Evangelists; I believe in Chubb, Collins, Toland, Tindal, Morgan, Mandeville, Hobbes, Shaftesbury. I believe in Lord Bolingbroke [Hume, Voltaire, Diderot, Boulanger, Volney, and Thomas Paine]; I believe not St. Paul.

"I believe not revelation; I believe in tradition. I believe in the Talmud; I believe in the Koran; I believe not the Bible. I believe in Socrates; I believe in Confucius; I believe in Sanchoniathon; I believe in Mahomet; I believe not in Christ.

"Lastly, I believe in all unbelief."*

The connexion between the revolting creed of infidels and their loose morals is impressive and

* Quoted in Horne's Introduction to the Critical Study of the Scriptures, vol. i., p. 381.

admonitory. "They explicitly deny that there is anything criminal in a wicked intention."* "Will you dare to assert," says an admirer of Voltaire, but who disapproved of his opposition to Christianity, "that it is in philosophic [infidel] families we are to look for models of filial respect, conjugal love, sincerity in friendship, or fidelity among domestics? Were you disposed to do so, would not your own conscience, your own experience, suppress the falsehood, even before your lips could utter it?"† The same question might be asked concerning the Mormon and Socialist communities. While, therefore, those who reject the Bible as the rule of their lives are, generally speaking, addicted to immoral practices, such as profane swearing, lying, drunkenness, and lewdness,—those who believe its doctrines, and form their lives by its precepts, are the most sober, upright, and useful members of society.

In compiling these pages I have endeavoured to employ a simple and familiar style, as if speaking to you.

You will at once perceive my object: it is to inspire you with an abhorrence of that which is evil,

* Volney's *Law of Nature*, p. 18.

† Linguet's *Review of Voltaire's Works*, p. 264.

and a firm resolve to cleave to that which is good, by promoting in you a thoughtful, reverent, prayerful, and practical study of the Holy Scriptures.

“In every work regard the writer’s end,
Since none can compass more than they intend.”

The perusal of these pages will not fail, I hope, to impress you with the necessity of conversion to God. This will be your best preservative from “error in doctrine and viciousness in life.” Let this conversion, however, be associated with strict self-government, that, by Divine grace, you may be preserved from those evils against which you are warned. That grace will be vouchsafed in answer to humble, importunate, believing prayer. This course is recommended by the example of the saintly FLETCHER, vicar of Madeley, who “frequently threw himself on the floor, and lay there most of the night, bathed in tears,” until, by prayer, he obtained from God a complete victory over the hastiness of temper which was natural to him.* For that victory he was indebted to Christ; for while prayer is the means, and grace the source, the blood of Christ is the procuring cause of every blessing. Of the

* *Life*, by Benson, p. 337.

glorified saints it is said, "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb."* O that you, my young friends, may be numbered with that victorious multitude in glory everlasting! prays

Your affectionate servant,

ROBERT HUSTON.

* Rev. xii. 11.

CHAPTER II.

Anger.

ANGER—a word of Saxon origin—is “uneasiness on receiving an injury; the effect of provocation.”* It has been defined again, “a violent passion of the mind, arising upon the receipt, or supposed receipt, of an injury, with a present purpose of revenge.”† And again, “a resentful emotion of the mind, upon receipt of an affront or injury.”‡ This is what is called sinful anger. But all anger is by no means sinful. The anger which is innocent is “a feeling of strong displacency at that which is in itself evil, or base, or injurious to others.”§ The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, our great Exemplar, was thus angry. He looked round about upon the Pharisees “with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.”|| The anger of grief, therefore, or of holy

* Bailey. † Buck. ‡ Watson. § Ibid.

|| Mark iii. 5.

indignation at the folly or wickedness of others, is allowable: only remember the Scripture says, "Be ye angry, and sin not."*

Sinful anger is an *unlovely* passion. It deforms the countenance, and gives a sullen and unamiable expression to the features. Thus, when "Cain was wroth, his countenance fell."† It is an *unhappy* passion, since it disturbs and agitates the mind. It is an *injurious* passion,—injurious to others, for you are never angry without feeling inclined to punish those who have provoked the feeling. The passion in you is almost sure to stir up the same passion in others. And it cannot but be injurious to yourselves. Instances have occurred in which it has produced serious bodily disorders by its violent action upon the nerves, heart, stomach, and other organs of the system. Mention is made in history of a king of Hungary and other princes who died in excessive fits of rage. And it is a *murderous* passion. Of this we have numberless examples. Let us dwell for a little on that of CAIN, already mentioned.

The occasion of that anger was the rejection of his offering and the acceptance of Abel's.‡ But

* Ephes. iv. 26. † Gen. iv. 5. ‡ Gen. iv.

Cain alone was to blame. It was his own pride, impenitency, and unbelief that provoked God to disrespect and reject both him and his offering. Instead of yielding to proud and sullen wrath, he ought to have resisted it, and prayed for grace to conquer himself. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."* Cain ought to have been admonished and humbled by the fact made evident in the Divine acceptance of Abel's worship, that an offering presented with a broken spirit and a contrite heart, and in the way Divinely appointed, is *alone* "an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour." How humiliating to human nature that the first murder arose out of worship offered to God! And still more so, that it is but one of countless murders which have resulted from bigotry and jealousy in matters of religion! "Moved with envy," many are still full of "wrath," and their "countenance fallen," because others testify that their devotions and services meet with tokens of Divine respect and acceptance. Did the British constitution allow it, how soon would they employ the "secular arm," as in other lands and other

* Prov. xvi. 32.

ages, in unnatural and unrelenting hate and fury against their unoffending brother! Whatever "descent" they may boast of, they are the successors of CAIN. Apostolical Christianity is ever distinguished by a *true catholic* spirit.

The authorities of ROME not merely license but *command* persecution against those who religiously differ from that Church. This is made undeniable by the portions of Dens's Theology which bear on the subject, the notes to the Douay Bible used in Ireland, and sanctioned by Bishop Troy, the third canon of the fourth Council of Lateran, Thomas Aquinas, and other standards of Maynooth College. The bitter fruit of Cain's anger was the violent "death of Abel." This was the first act of religious persecution. All, therefore, who "go in the way of Cain" may claim the same relationship as he of whom it is said, "He was of that wicked one," because, for a difference in opinion and worship, "he slew his brother."*

Nothing can justify deeds of violence or blood to "root up" heretics, as they are called. This is decided by the parable of the tares. "Let both grow together," said our Lord, "until the harvest."† Then He, the Lord of the harvest, will *infallibly*

* 1 John iii. 12.

† Matt. xiii. 30.

distinguish between the wheat and tares, and deal with them accordingly.

The only weapons to be employed in the destruction of doctrinal error are those which are moral and spiritual. "The weapons of our warfare," says St. Paul, "are not carnal;" yet are they not less but more effectual for the purpose, for they are "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."*

The advocates of religious persecution will not fail to quote Scripture in their defence. You will at once see that they put the word of God to the *rack* and *torture*, to *extort* from it a sanction of their fiendish views and purposes. You have an instance of this in the use made of Hebrews xii. 20 by Tetzels, the fiery zealot employed by Leo X. to vend indulgences. One of his notable propositions was: "Christians must be taught that they who scribble so many books and papers, or who publicly and wickedly preach or dispute concerning oral confession, satisfaction by works, the rich and great indulgences of the Bishop of Rome, and his power; that they who take part with those who preach or write such things, who take pleasure in their writings, and spread them

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

amongst the people and in the world; that those, in fine, who talk of these things in secret, in a base and shameless manner, must all tremble with apprehension of incurring the penalties we have just named," ("cruel punishment, with divers chastisements, to the terror of all men,") "of plunging themselves into eternal damnation hereafter, and into present great opprobrium here below: 'For every beast that touches the mountain shall be stoned!'" *

Cain was inflated with pharisaic pride and contempt: so are persecutors. Cain was an unrenewed man, whose carnality was reproved by the spirituality of his brother: so are they. Persecutors of those who are "after the Spirit," however they may disguise or justify it, give proof that they themselves are "after the flesh."† Archbishop Leighton was once asked what he thought was the "mark of the Beast;" to which he replied, that it was "*a pair of horns*," by which so many were *pushed* and *gored* under the Romanising government of that day.‡

The "punishment" of Cain reminds you that

* D'Aubigné's Reformation, part i., p. 93.

† Gal. iv. 29.

‡ Leighton's Life, by Pearson, p. 131.

the persecutors of God's people meet with righteous retribution often *in the present world*. The pagan Roman emperors, who gained for themselves a bad celebrity by having the Christians thrown into the flames, to the lions, or into caldrons of boiling oil, did not die "the common death of all men." Domitian was murdered by his own people. Heliogabalus was slain by his own soldiers. Claudius was eaten of worms while he lived. Decius was killed in battle. Dioclesian lost his reason. Galerius, of all the tyrants of his time the most cruel, was seized with a horrible disease; his domestics could not bear to be near him, the stench from his ulcers was so offensive; and some of his physicians were put to death because they could not cure him. Maxentius, in his flight from a battle which he lost, fell into the Tiber, and was drowned. Maximinus, who put out the eyes of many Christians, died miserably, his eyes starting out of his head through the violence of his distemper. Julian perished in his expedition against the Persians.*

It were easy to multiply examples of the righteous judgments of God against modern persecutors.

If you, my young friends, should at any time

* See Simpson's Key to the Prophecies, p. 347 *et seq.*

be the objects of persecution, covert or open, from "those of your own household," or from others; or should you be subject to injury and annoyance in any form; you will need grace, to guard against the indulgence of a wrong spirit. *Nature*, in such case, will require to be kept under the restraint of Gospel principles and precepts. The happiest course in the end, though not the most pleasing to flesh and blood at the present, will be, as our Lord enjoins, to "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."*

* Matt. v. 44.

CHAPTER III.

Intemperance.

HOWEVER doctors and others may differ as to the utility of stimulants for preserving or restoring health in some cases,—that drunkenness is an odious, degrading, and destructive vice admits of no controversy. On this subject the word of God gives no uncertain sound: “The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty.”* “And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.”† “Be not deceived: neither fornication

* Prov. xxiii. 21.

† Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

tors, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, shall inherit the kingdom of God."*

Drunkenness dethrones reason.

See that wretched man, the victim of such excess ! His brain is unduly excited ; he cannot conceive a correct thought, or form a sound judgment. His expressions are confused, incoherent, unmeaning. He raves like a maniac ; or, it may be, he is quite incapable of utterance. Memory is destroyed ; conscience is stupefied ; the heart is hardened ; all power over the will is lost. At last—in the case of the habitual drunkard—*delirium tremens* ensues, which DR. GRAHAM thus graphically describes : "The principal *symptoms* are want of appetite, nausea and vomiting, giddiness, a sense of confusion in the head, want of sleep, an anxious expression of the countenance, and tremor of the hands. Then the patient exhibits an expression of alarm and suspicion ; the eyes are cast about with quick and scrutinizing glances, or, apparently fixed upon some particular object ; the tremor of the hands increases ; the patient becomes irritable, and sometimes iras-

* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

cible ; he is extremely restless, walks continually to and fro, and is unable to obtain a moment's sleep. After follows mental disorder, loquaciousness, and a continued succession of various alarming, disgusting, and ludicrous apparitions. He fancies he sees dogs, snakes, cats, mice, and other animals in his room ; or that various persons have entered for the purpose of robbing, killing, or annoying him ; and to avoid these he runs to the door to make his escape, or to the window to leap out. He often starts with terror and agitation."*

Drunkenness empties the purse.

You need not be told that poverty, filth, rags, and wretchedness are its attendants ; but, O ! who can number the instances ? Their name is not merely legion, but legion multiplied beyond calculation ! I refrain from giving examples of this effect of drunkenness ; for it were an endless task.

Drunkenness depraves the character.

Who would trust a coachman safely to manage the horses, or an engine-driver to guide the train, while in a state of intoxication ? Who would risk his life, or the life of his friend, in the hands of a

* Domestic Medicine, p. 416.

physician who is the slave of intemperance? Who would commit himself and his family, for a long and dangerous voyage, to a vessel commanded by a notoriously drunken captain? Intemperate habits destroy all that is good and excellent in character. Many men of great endowments, who contracted such habits, have left behind a sullied reputation,—the result of talents abused and time wasted. Their happiness was blighted and prospects blasted by their own sin and folly.

An affecting case of this kind is that of ROBERT BURNS, the celebrated Scottish bard. He possessed a superior intellect, a kind heart, social qualities of a high order, and the true poetic genius in no ordinary degree. The records of his early life, before he became the victim of intemperance, are all full of interest. His parents were intelligent and moral; and, until he became a drunken sot, so was he. The rich who admired his talents invited him to their dwellings, and led him into scenes of gaiety, dissipation, and into those *drinking habits* which became the ruin of the man they professed to admire. Thus his character became depraved, his person was despised, and his society shunned.

Another case in point is that of RICHARD

BRINSLEY SHERIDAN, one of the most gifted men of the last century,—a great speaker in the House of Commons,—a man of uncommon learning and wit, and of rare ability as a writer. Yet this debasing vice tarnished his fame, undermined his constitution, and shortened his days. So completely was he under the power of strong drink, that, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his physician, he would not refrain, even when death threatened him.*

After the Deluge we are informed that Noah “planted a vineyard, drank of the wine, and was drunken.”† Although many commentators charitably conclude that he was not aware of the intoxicating properties of the beverage, yet it fixes a *seeming* blot, which all must regret, on the character of “Noah, the preacher of righteousness.” It was the occasion, also, of unbecoming conduct in his son Ham; which brought a curse upon him and his posterity.

The occurrence suggests such reflections as these: As Noah was uncovered in his tent, drunkenness exposes men. They betray infirmities and reveal secrets when drunken, which, if

* See *Morning Dewdrops*, by Mrs. Balfour, pp. 208—210.

† Gen. ix. 20, 21.

sober, they would conceal. And, as drunkenness exposes, so it disgraces men. At such times their own friends regard them with contempt. Besides, drunkenness in parents is the fruitful source of crime, folly, and suffering in their children.*

This appears also in the history of Lot.† Here, again, charity would extenuate or cover the sin. He was forced to escape to a mountain, and to reside in a cave. But what a reverse ! He who could scarcely find room for himself and his flocks in the whole land, is confined to a narrow "hole in a hill." Was there not something retributive here ? From worldly motives he went to reside at Sodom ; and now, cut off from "the communion of saints," he is exposed to temptation, and, under the influence of wine, falls into the crime of incest. It is significant and admonitory that, after this, we read no more of Lot. Thus, also, is *his* character spotted by the intoxicating cup. "No doubt," says Matthew Henry, "he repented of his sin, and was pardoned ; but from the silence of Scripture concerning him henceforward, we may learn that drunkenness, as it makes men forgetful, so it makes them forgotten. Many

* See Matthew Henry on Gen. ix. 19, &c.

† Gen. xix.

a name which otherwise might have been remembered with respect, is buried by it in contempt and oblivion."*

Drunkenness makes home unhappy.

Imagine, if you can, the unhappiness of Noah and Lot, with their families, *after* those acts commented on, so faithfully recorded in the sacred page. Look at the drunkard's household. See those ill-clad, ill-fed, ill-governed, ill-mannered children. See that neglected, broken-spirited wife. How haggard her features, how squalid her appearance ; though once lovely, contented, and happy ! How strong her temptations to drown grief in that fatal cup which has been the bitter cause of all her sorrows ! And see the drunken husband and father himself. How stupid ! How unreasonable ! How irritable ! How selfish ! How cruel ! Regardless of the peace, the health, perhaps the *life* of her who was once the object of his fondest affection ; and, it may be, so maddened as to become the ruthless murderer of his own children.

And look at the drunkard's dwelling. How bare, how comfortless ! Clothes and furniture

* Notes on Gen. xix.

sold or pawned, to satisfy his *insatiable* desire for drink ; until, from the accusations, reproaches, and altercations of which it is now the scene, the spot on earth most like the wretched abode "where peace and rest can never dwell" is his own home.

Drunkenness is the sure road to a premature grave.

"The wicked shall not prolong his days."* Drunken men often do "not live out half their days." Ancient history confirms this truth. ALEXANDER THE GREAT is said to have begun life with a great love of temperance. One of his sayings was, "I will have no cooks but sobriety and exercise." But intemperate habits were formed, and he became a confirmed and degraded drunkard. This man, who conquered every place and people he attacked, and is reported to have wept because there was not another world to conquer, himself was conquered by strong drink ; excessive indulgence in which brought on a fever, of which he died, when only thirty-three years of age. Similar is the testimony of modern history. JAMES LACKINGTON, the celebrated London bookseller, says of his *father*, "His habitual

* Eccles. viii. 13.

drunkenness shortened his days nearly one half, and he died unregretted by his own children."*

We have already seen that BURNS and SHERIDAN, by their excesses, hastened their end ; as all "fast young men" are sure to do : for intemperate habits can only hasten them to an untimely grave.

If you, my youthful readers, would escape these dread evils, see that you make *no approach* to such habits. Except when prescribed by a physician, avoid all intoxicating drinks. In prayerful dependence upon "grace to help in time of need," promptly and resolutely resist every temptation to intemperance which thoughtless people may throw in your way.

* See Balfour's Morning Dewdrops, chaps. iii. and xiv.

CHAPTER IV.

Worldliness.

THE history of Lot's wife, though brief, is full of interest and instruction. All that is said of her in Scripture is comprised in two passages, one in the Old Testament, and one in the New. That in the former reads: "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."* And that in the latter: "Remember Lot's wife."†

Her case will serve to illustrate the evils and dangers of worldliness.

The command given to Lot was, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." This command his wife slighted and disregarded. Her contempt of so positive an injunction deserved, as it received, signal punishment.

In the absence of further information, it is

* Gen. xix. 26. † Luke xvii. 32.

difficult to say what was the precise or exclusive *phase* of her worldliness. One writer, in censuring Lot for the worldly motives by which he was actuated in choosing Sodom for his place of abode, remarks that "he was severely chastised for his residence in Sodom by the extreme distress he suffered in the different branches of his family, which doubtless were much corrupted through their connexions in the place."* Again, speaking of Lot's wife, he says, "What was her offence? Doubtless she looked back, from an improper attachment to the things she had left behind."†

How much harm there may be, as to its immediate and remote consequences, in a look! How necessary and important, therefore, the prayer, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity!"‡

Several reasons why Lot's wife looked back, however, are suggested by the circumstances of the case. It was, perhaps, a look of unbelief as to the sincerity of the Divine threat *completely* to overthrow Sodom; or a look of curiosity to witness its execution; or a look censuring the "severity of God" in the fulfilment of that threat; or a look of regret at being separated from her

* Robinson's Scripture Characters, p. 50. † Ibid.

‡ Psalm cxix. 37.

acquaintances ; or of grief at the loss of her property in Sodom. Or it may have been a look which expressed a combination of all these feelings. But that she was *mainly* influenced by a regard for her worldly possessions, is evident from our Lord's reference to it in foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem : "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his STUFF IN THE HOUSE, let him not come down to take it away : and he that is in the FIELD, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife :"—from which the inference is plain, that her act was chiefly a look of distress at the loss of their property in the place.

There is a great variety of opinion as to the nature of her punishment : "she became a pillar of salt." The disbelievers in miracles contend that nothing more is meant than that she was suffocated, or that a column of metallic salt was erected upon her grave. Others affirm that she became incrustated with the sulphur, insomuch that she appeared like an Egyptian mummy embalmed with salt ; others, that she became *like* a pillar of salt, placed or stationed, and hence they infer that she remained fixed on the bitumen, and so was

* Luke xvii. 31, 32.

burnt. Others hold to the opinion—sanctioned by the rule of Scripture interpretation, that we should never depart from the plain and literal sense, unless for cogent reasons forced to do so—that by the miraculous power of God she was changed into a mass of rock-salt, retaining the human figure.* Josephus even asserts that the pillar continued to his time, and that he saw it. “But Lot’s wife continually turning back to view the city as she went from it, and being too nicely inquisitive what would become of it, although God had forbidden her to do so, was changed into a pillar of salt; for I have seen it, and it remains at this day.”†

Much precious time is often vainly spent in discussing matters of curiosity and doubtful disputation, like this pillar. Our Lord declined to answer profitless questions. When one asked, “Are there few that be saved?” mark His salutary counsel, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate;”‡ as if to say, “Repress such fruitless speculations, but take this course, if you would be one of the few.”

* Poole.

† Works, by Whiston, p. 41. That it was then standing is also asserted by Clement of Rome, a cotemporary of Josephus; and in the next century by Irenæus. Ibid (note).

‡ Luke xiii. 23, 24.

It is clear, from the narrative, that the occurrence in the case of Lot's wife was a miracle of judgment. This is enough for you to know. What specially concerns you is the *moral*, as Matthew Henry suggests: "Though she was nearly related to a righteous man, and though a monument of distinguishing mercy in her deliverance out of Sodom, yet God did not connive at her disobedience; for great privileges will not secure us from the wrath of God, if we do not carefully and faithfully improve them. *This pillar of salt should season us.*"* It cannot fail to do so, if you learn from it those lessons which it is designed to teach. Bunyan considers Sodom an emblem of "THE WORLD," which he terms "the city of Destruction."† Of course he means the world in the sense of St. John,‡ of St. Paul,§ and of the Psalmist.||

Have you ever set out on pilgrimage to "the celestial city?" If not, why? Is it because of your inordinate love for "the things that are in the world?" Because, like MR. WORLDLY-WISE-MAN in Bunyan's allegory, who dwelt in "the town of Carnal-policy," you judge that a religious life

* Note on Gen. xix. 26. † Pilgrim's Progress.

‡ 1 John ii. 15, 16. § 2 Tim. iv. 10. || Ps. xvii. 14.

would mar your temporal prospects? It might, indeed, prevent undue and unlawful haste to be rich; but it would also prevent that destruction and perdition in which so many, now-a-days, are drowned.* True piety gives its possessor a special interest in the paternal providence and promises of God.†

But more likely, as young persons, if you have not entered on this pilgrimage, you have been hindered rather by the *people* than by the *things* of the world. Your most powerful attraction to the world, probably, is the company of the volatile "lovers of pleasure more than God," who have, or supremely seek, "their portion in this life." It may be difficult to convince you that such friendships and associations are ruinously dangerous; but "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it:" "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed"‡—destroyed in principle, in character, in purse, and in prospects, for time and eternity.

"Sodom and Egypt," mentioned Rev. xi. 8, refer to Rome. Behold the picture: is it like? "And their dead bodies shall lie in

* 1 Tim. vi. 9. † Luke xii. 22—32; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

‡ Prov. xiii. 20.

the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." This GREAT CITY in pagan times, and the Church since denominated from it, may well be called "Sodom" for its abominations ; "Egypt" because of its tyranny and cruelty towards the people of God ; and "the place where our Lord was crucified" because of its slaughter of His followers, since He takes what is done to them as done to Himself.*

It may be that some of you, my young friends, taught and admonished by the word of God, have fled from this Sodom ; that you have obeyed the mandate, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."† If you regard the smiles or frowns, the flatteries or bribes, of importunate relatives or former associates, you may often be strongly tempted to return. Big with calamity will be the hour that witnesses your compliance. In such case, you return to be partakers of her "plagues." This caution is applicable, also, to those Protestants who, from a desire for notoriety or other *worldly* motive, have been perverted to the Church of Rome. Some of the plagues in

* Matt. xxv. 40, 45. † Rev. xviii. 4.

question have reference to the present world. One of them is *treachery*. Of this you and the perverts referred to will have bitter experience, should necessity, in the judgment of this Church, require it. Stubborn facts are the proof. Although partly by promises, partly by threats, JEROME OF PRAGUE was induced at the Council of Constance to retract his sentiments, his retraction was disregarded. He was remanded to prison, re-examined, and committed to the flames.* By the snares laid for ARCHBISHOP CRANMER, his constancy was overcome, and, in a moment of weakness, he abjured; but his abjuration was of no avail. Nothing could satisfy his enemies, and the enemies of the Reformation, but his death. These facts, so illustrative of Roman perfidy, are undeniable. When he saw the intention of his judges, he came to himself; and, full of confusion, shame, and penitence, retracted his abjuration at the stake, holding the hand that signed the document in the fire till it dropped off, occasionally exclaiming, "That unworthy hand."†

O! that all who are *in* the Roman Sodom, all who have left it and are *in danger of returning*,

* Milner's Church History, in one vol., p. 647.

† See Rapin's History of England, vol. viii., p. 190.

and all so-called Protestants who are *looking towards it*, would wisely regard the command given to Lot as if addressed to themselves, and yield to it prompt obedience : "Escape for thy life ; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain ; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed !" L

CHAPTER V.

Revenge.

LET me first assist you correctly to understand the nature of this passion, and then call your attention to that illustration of it found in the conduct of Esau.* Revenge, from the Latin *re* and *vindico*, through the French *revancher*,† is “the taking satisfaction for an affront or injury done.”‡ “Anger hath a hurting inclination, malice is fixed anger, and revenge is the fruit of both or either of them.”§ “Revenge is a cool and deliberate wickedness, and is often executed years after the offence is given.”|| “Men revenge themselves out of weakness, because they are too much influenced by self-love. A great soul overlooks and despises injuries.”¶

* Gen. xxvii. † Sullivan's Dictionary of Derivations.

‡ Bailey's Etymological Dictionary.

§ Baxter's Christian Directory, chap. ix.

|| Buck's Dictionary.

¶ Cruden's Concordance.

Not to dwell on Esau's profanity in lightly estimating and contemptuously selling his birth-right for a mess of pottage, or on any other of his exceptionable qualities, let me invite you to consider the REVENGEFUL SPIRIT which he indulged: "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob." *

Let us notice some of the properties of Esau's purposed revenge.

It was secret.—He said "in his heart" that he would murder his brother. He would, doubtless, have been ashamed or afraid to utter this speech in the hearing of any human being. But the all-seeing and heart-searching God heard it, and it was made known to Rebekah. The inspired historian, by committing it to writing, has exposed to permanent view what Esau would have wished eternally hidden. Now, my young friends, these things are written for your admonition. *You* may have formed revengeful projects at times when you thought yourselves aggrieved. Perhaps you imagine that the purposes conceived, and the speeches uttered *in your heart* at those times,

* Gen. xxvii. 41.

are only known to yourselves. Vain imagination! The Bible demonstrates that, as Dr. Young says, "your thoughts are heard in heaven." The thoughts and intents of your hearts, as well as your most secret actions, unless forgiven, as Dr. Watts has it, shall

" Be all exposed before the sun,
While men and angels hear."

"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*

Esau's revenge was unnatural.—He "hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him." Whom did he hate? His own brother! And why? Because his father had blessed him! Many young people in this respect go in the way of Esau. Perhaps *you* are of the number. You have discovered, you think, on the part of your parents undue partiality,—an unkind preference for other members of the family in the bestowment of favours. They have been at greater expense and taken greater pains in their education, you consider, than in yours. More vigorous effort has been made to promote their

* Eccles. xii. 14.

well-doing in life. Moreover, your patrimony has been, in your conviction, unjustly withheld, or unfairly apportioned. Now, most probably, these thoughts of your heart are groundless surmises; but even if they were all true, they would not justify, because *nothing* can justify, hatred and malignity towards your "own mother's son."

Esau's revenge was associated with no ordinary measure of disrespect and contempt for his parents.

—As Isaac's end drew near, Esau determined to outrage every feeling of respect for his father's memory by making his death the occasion of his brother's murder: "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob."

This was as unjust as it was unkind. His father had not intended to bestow the blessing on Jacob. It was obtained by deception and fraud. But, in refusing to undo what he had done, the patriarch, no doubt, saw that he had good reason. He could not have forgotten Esau's profanity in despising the valuable privilege of the birth-right, which would have made him a kind of priest and king in his father's house. And that profane act was not constrained, as in Jacob's case, by his mother's influence. He might also

have considered that a "profane person," as Esau then proved himself to be, was not likely to be honoured as the progenitor of the Messiah; and that, consequently, our Lord should spring out of Jacob. The lesson is plain: If your parents have departed from their original intention towards you, they may have had ample reason for doing so.

But, supposing Isaac at fault in this one act, should Esau have forgotten all his former partialities and favours towards him in resenting that one? and that in a manner the most insulting and impious? Rather should he have passed over the act as an infirmity of old age, or waited meekly to have the reason revealed in the future. As to *your* parents, I might ask you similar questions.

Esau's revenge was diabolical.—According to Milton, it was to resent his loss of heaven that Satan meditated the downfall of our first parents:

"Public reason just,

Honour and empire, with *revenge* enlarged,

By conquering this new world, compels me now

To do what else, though damn'd, I should abhor."*

Esau's revenge, therefore, degraded him *below* the

* Paradise Lost.

modern man of honour ! This brings the subject of *duelling* under your consideration. You see at once whose image they bear—whose children they are—who resort to this expedient to decide their quarrels.* The custom, although sanctioned and rendered honourable by the false notions prevailing on the subject, and by long usage, is not only a glaring breach of the Divine command, but a violation of the letter and spirit of British law. This is decided by competent authority : “Express malice is when one, with a sedate deliberate mind and formed design, doth kill another ; which formed design is evidenced by external circumstances discovering that inward intention ; as lying in wait, antecedent menaces, former grudges, and concerted schemes to do him some bodily harm. This takes in the case of deliberate duelling, where both parties meet avowedly with an intent to murder : thinking it their duty, as gentlemen, and claiming it as their right, to wanton with their own lives and those of their fellow-creatures ; without any warrant or authority from any power either Divine or human, but in direct contradiction to the laws both of God and man : and therefore the law has justly fixed the crime and

* John viii. 44.

punishment of murder on them, and on their seconds also.”*

Esau, however, intentionally sunk the duellist in the assassin.

His revenge for the loss of the birthright, not merely of the blessing, was bitter in the remembrance, as well as in its consequences.†—Esau’s ill conduct was aggravated by his marriage with daughters of the land, “which were a grief of mind” (“bitterness of spirit”—margin) “unto Isaac and Rebekah.”‡ The same fault committed by you may, unhappily, lead to similar results. It too often happens that under irritation, while their understanding and judgment are blinded by revenge, young persons form unequal and unsuitable alliances, the source of unmixed misery through life, and which prove eternally fatal at last.

Besides the unhappiness caused by grieving his parents at the time, what an amount of mental wretchedness must Esau have endured during Jacob’s twenty years’ absence! For his revenge appears to have been unabated up to the time he went to meet him, and “four hundred men with

* Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England, vol. iv., p. 199.

† Gen. xxvii. 36.

‡ Gen. xxvi. 34, 35.

him." A due regard, therefore, to your own peace would suggest the folly of yielding to this disquieting passion.

It is also an impressive fact that Esau's enmity towards Jacob originated a *family feud*, which was transmitted to his posterity, and continued for a succession of ages. The long-cherished and deep-rooted aversion of Edom towards Israel is matter of Scripture history. Be admonished by this, that an act of revenge on your part may occasion a similar quarrel among your friends, surviving yourselves, and producing melancholy fruit, many years after you have descended into the grave.

A wiser counsel, in conclusion, cannot be given you than that of the apostle: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine." Therefore, if wronged, prayerfully leave Him who cannot err to judge as to the reality and extent of the injury, and to deal with it accordingly: "I will repay, saith the Lord."*

* Rom. xii. 19.

CHAPTER VI.

Injustice.

THIS chapter is intended especially for those of you who do or may sustain the relation of masters, mistresses, or servants. By "servants" I do not mean household servants merely, but all those who are in the service or employment of others.

The character of LABAN is not without some excellencies.* His kind reception of Jacob when he fled from the face of Esau is worthy of commendation. Although Jacob was a stranger to him, he did not yield to uncharitable suspicions, as if he apprehended deception; nor did he *assume* such suspicions as an excuse for refusing the rights of hospitality; but, crediting the account which Jacob gave of himself, he generously bade him welcome. The conduct of Laban on this occasion instructs you to show kindness, if

* See Gen. xxix.—xxxi.

able, to your relations in times of affliction and perplexity.

During the ensuing month after his arrival, Jacob, although as yet but a guest, was not an idler, but served his uncle so efficiently that he found it his interest to retain him. Laban, therefore, makes the following proposal to Jacob; fair, honourable, just:—"Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou serve me for nought? Tell me, what shall thy wages be?"* Up to this point there seems nothing to censure in word or deed, either in the uncle or nephew. The contract made was that Jacob should serve Laban seven years for Rachel. To this long apprenticeship he agreed with ready cheerfulness "for the love he bare to her."

At the end of that period, urged on to it, apparently, by a grasping covetousness, Laban broke his contract, and had recourse to a plan by which he retained Jacob "yet seven other years." Principle once violated, such a repetition of dishonourable acts followed, as to give occasion for Jacob's cutting complaint, twice repeated, that Laban changed his wages ten times.† This fixes upon Laban the charge of INJUSTICE AS A MASTER.

* Gen. xxix. 15.

† Gen. xxxi.

There seems to have been ground for the same charge otherwise. He obliged Jacob, it would appear, to make good what was damaged or lost, though not by any neglect or fault of his: "I bare the loss; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night."* For employers to do so would neither be kind nor just. They should be governed by the *golden rule*. Jacob was a hireling, and his master oppressed him. To act a similar part is sure to provoke to anger that JUST ONE who says, "I will be a swift witness against those that oppress" (or "defraud"—margin) "the hireling in his wages."† From this passage it is clear that, in the Divine judgment, to refuse to give "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work," or to withhold from servants their hard-earned "hire," is glaring fraud and oppression. Those thus defrauded will feel it all the more keenly because of their poverty; for what would be but an inconsiderable loss to the master, might prove ruinous to them. And the injustice will be still more intolerable, if they have it not in their power to protect themselves.

But some of you may ask, Was Jacob guilty of

* Gen. xxxi. 39.

† Mal. iii. 5.

no injustice towards his master,—in the matter of the “cattle,” for example!* Perhaps you will conclude with one writer, “Whether this was *honest* policy admits of a question;” and with Kirro, “The bargain with his uncle proves too clearly that his moral feelings had not undergone improvement, and that the original taint of [supplanting] prudence, and the sad lessons of his mother in deceit, had produced some of their natural fruit in his bosom.”†

Others are of opinion that Jacob was justified in the course he took, on the ground that he had a right to indemnify himself for losses sustained by his uncle’s unjust and fraudulent dealing towards him; and that he took that course under Divine direction.‡

Another commentator observes: “In the success of Jacob in obtaining the reward of his services, we see a lesson taught us in the interposition of Providence in his behalf, that masters should give their just dues to those who serve them faithfully. Whatever may be said of the contrivance of Jacob respecting the flocks, or the practice of eastern

* Gen. xxx.

† Encyclopedia of Biblical Literature, p. 447.

‡ See Henry on Gen. xxx.

shepherds, it is obvious from the extraordinary success of Jacob's scheme, that the hand of God was in it; and more obvious from the vision which Jacob afterwards saw, in which the angel declared, 'I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee.' Laban was a hard master; he had contrived to secure long services from Jacob for his two daughters; and when he gave him wages, he was always shuffling, and changed them no less than ten times. But He who is the God of the pious servant, as well as of the pious master, saw the oppression to which Jacob was subjected, and, as it were, undertook Himself, from Laban's property, to pay him his just wages."*

Whichever of these views you take of the transaction, you will at once see that injustice on the part of employers is a temptation to the employed to pay themselves in full, if they can do so by *any* means. Not that fraud in the servant can ever be justified by fraud in the master, since every one must give account of himself to God; but the one naturally leads to the other.

When there is a fair contract,—a contract affording mutual satisfaction,—for servants then to expect more is dishonest; for masters to give

* Cobbin's Commentary, Reflection iii. on Gen. xxx.

less is unjust. Were employers and employed to remember this, and were the latter to feel a considerate gratitude towards the former in times of business-depression, how many an irritating "strike" for wages might be prevented!

Now that slavery in the West Indies, and, it may be added, in the United States of America, is no more, it would be well if those masters, once the proprietors of slaves, and their voluntary servants, could be brought to apprehend clearly, and conscientiously to act on, the equitable principles of the Gospel. Then might the latter be found "showing all good fidelity" and "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things;"* while the former, giving to their servants "that which is just and equal,"† would escape the sore and certain punishment in store for the sordid oppressor, the haughty wrong-doer of whom the apostle speaks: "Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."‡

Justice to *household* servants requires that due

* Titus ii. 10. † Colos. iv. 1. ‡ James v. 3, 4.

regard be shown for their *spiritual interests*. For this purpose, when you have such under your authority, and even now while they are subject to the rule of your parents or guardians, avoid all injurious familiarity with them. Let your carriage towards them be marked by dignity and kindness in their due proportions. Such carriage is recommended at once by the duties you owe to yourselves and to them.

If you would be of use to them spiritually, you will need to proportion their duties to the state of their health, and the degree of their physical strength. In this respect you will do well to adopt the course pursued by the apostles towards the churches: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you NO GREATER BURDEN THAN THESE NECESSARY THINGS."*

An example to illustrate my meaning is found in a young lady whose memorial, written by her father, will amply repay perusal:—"Instead of thoughtlessly adding to the labour of the servant, Mary took pleasure in excusing her from an errand, when she could connect it with one of her own walks; and when there was an unwonted press of domestic duties, she would, unbidden,

* Acts xv. 28.

select some lighter service, and rejoiced if she succeeded in finishing it before it was understood to be begun." As might be expected, "these kindnesses on her part were, in most instances, received with gratitude, and repaid with mingled respect and love. Among the many who mourned the early death of our dear Mary, and who still cherish the memory of her piety and condescending kindness, Ruth K—— is one of the most sincere. And we have pleasure in placing it on record, that the last letter Mary ever wrote was one addressed to her."*

Solicitude for the salvation of your servants will prompt you to make efforts for their mental improvement, and to devise plans by which they may enjoy the rest of the Sabbath, so as to profit by the services of the sanctuary. Their attendance at family worship, likewise, should, if possible, be secured. A just concern for their eternal welfare requires, also, that they should not be permitted to commit sin, or omit religious duty, unreprieved. Fidelity to your Master in heaven demands that you should, in such cases, be found faithful to them. The authority with which you

* Memorial of Miss Mary M'Owan, by her father, Rev. Peter M'Owan.

have been invested is a talent, for the mild, firm, *beneficial* exercise of which you are responsible to Him. This ABRAHAM felt, of whom this high testimony has been transmitted to us: "I know him, that he will command his children and his HOUSEHOLD after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."*

O that your servants may have cause for eternal gratitude that while under your roof you were made the minister of God to them for good!

* Gen. xviii. 19.

CHAPTER VII.

Covetousness.

THERE is some shade of difference between covetousness and the love of money, as you learn from the tenth commandment, and from the confession of ACHAN: "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent."*

The command of Joshua that the Israelites should not enrich themselves with any of the spoils of Jericho was a positive injunction, having Divine sanction; so that, in violating this command, Achan committed a fearful sin, which met its just punishment, as you read in the narrative.

The manner in which he was discovered proves that his sin was revealed by God Himself.

* Joshua vii. 21.

Whether it was by Urim and Thummim, according to the Jews, or by lot, according to others, the result shows that the method employed was infallibly under Divine direction. It led to the detection of the real culprit; for he made an ingenuous acknowledgment of the whole.

This fact ought to deter you from the commission of crime. Should you imitate ACHAN, "be sure your sin will find you out."* God's all-seeing eye is on you; and He will not fail to "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart."† He will certainly reveal the act by the lips of an accomplice, by an eye-witness, by your own confession, or by some other means at some period, perhaps not far distant; or, if not, "the day shall declare it."‡

It is worthy of remark that Achan's family shared his disgrace and punishment. His sons and daughters, there is room to fear, were stoned with stones, and afterwards burned with fire. But if, according to some, no more is meant than that they were brought to witness their father's execution, it was ignominy and suffering enough. This will remind you, that should any of you be

* Num. xxxii. 23. † 1 Cor. iv. 5. ‡ 1 Cor. iii. 13.

guilty of theft,—the easily-besetting sin of some young people,—the act, especially if publicly known and punished, must afflict the hearts of your parents and friends with overwhelming shame and distress. To yield to this vile propensity, therefore, is to degrade yourselves in the eyes of all who have any regard for you, to wound the honour of your family, and, worse than all, to provoke the Holy One of Israel to anger.

Covetousness may be defined an inordinate desire for what we have not, associated with dissatisfaction with what we have. Its language is, "I will have more, by all means, and at any risk."

The evil and danger of covetousness are well described by a quaint writer under a familiar figure: "The covetous man is like a spider in this, that he doth nothing but lay his nets to catch every fly, gaping only for a booty of gain; so yet more in that, whilst he makes nets for these flies he consumeth his own bowels: so that which is his life is his death. If there be any creature miserable, it is he; and yet he is least to be pitied, because he makes himself miserable. Such as he is I will account him; and will, therefore, sweep down his webs and hate his

poison."* The evil is placed in an instructive light still farther by an able commentator: "Covetousness includes the desire of having, of increasing wealth, even when there is no design to sink into churlishness and illiberality. The great rule by which this criminal and dangerous desire of gain is ascertained to exist is, when it prevents us from applying with our whole heart to the work of our salvation. For then the worldly desires extinguish, or render inefficient, spiritual ones; prayer is restrained, or languid and powerless; and those words of St. John become applicable, 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' . . . A sin which does not alarm by obvious immoralities, which puts itself under even virtuous disguises of prudence and diligence, and which, therefore, often steals on men unawares."†

Let me now invite you to ponder the sin, in its qualities and aggravations, as committed by him from whom our illustration is supplied.

Achan's covetousness was progressive.—He did not rush upon the accursed thing, and seize it at once. No; and here his own confession conveys

* Bishop Hall's *Meditations and Vows*.

† Watson's *Exposition*, Luke xii. 15.

to you an admonition as needful as it is important: "I SAW; I COVETED; I TOOK; I HID." Here you are informed that the temptation was first presented to his *eye*. How often does it happen that this organ, given to minister enjoyment, is made, by its abuse, the avenue to sin! So it was with Eve: "When she SAW that the tree was good for food, and that it was PLEASANT TO THE EYES, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."*

" This fruit divine,
Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,
Of virtue to make wise: what hinders then
To reach, and feed at once both body and mind?
So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluck'd, she ate!
Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat,
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe
That all was lost."†

After gazing upon the spoils awhile, and seeing them so goodly, unlawful desire to possess them was excited in Achan's heart,—he "coveted them;" that desire prompted the forbidden act,—he "took them;" and then, filled with guilt,

* Gen. iii. 6.

† Paradise Lost.

shame, consternation, and fear, he "hid" them. How like the conduct of many who, neglecting to watch and pray, permit their *senses* to lead them into temptation! The thievish school-boy, for instance, sees the rosy apples, the mellow pears and plums, in his neighbour's garden; and as they are so pleasant to the eyes,—so inviting to the taste,—so tempting,—he breaks through the hedge or climbs over the wall, reckless of consequences, and *takes* of the fruit: a practical, and, alas! too frequent a comment upon "I saw, I coveted, I took!" I need hardly remind you that the young delinquent seldom fails to *hide* both the sin and the spoils.

Another, more advanced in years, looks upon the wine when it is red, or other intoxicating draught, and the mere sight of it brings him completely under its power.* Thus, not having their senses under proper government, many are "mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink." Upon these the prophet denounces a reiterated "woe."† Another looks upon a woman who is fair; and the look, unlawfully indulged, leads him, ultimately, into the "way to hell, going down to the chambers of

* See 1 Cor. vi. 12.

† Isaiah v.

death."* How wise, therefore, to follow the example of Job, who said, "I made a covenant with my eyes;" and of David, when he prayed, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity!"

Achan's covetousness amounted to the crime of sacrilege;—since Joshua decided, "All the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."†

Sacrilege is to appropriate to our own use what is devoted to religion; the crime of robbing heaven. Into this sin the whole Jewish nation had fallen in the days of Malachi.‡ This was also the sin of Achan. The covetous man must, of necessity, be a sacrilegious man. He robs God. He indulges the insatiable desire for "more," not that he may "have to give to him that needeth," or that he may meet the claims of religion with a liberal hand. He makes ingenious excuses for evading those claims altogether, or else presents to God no offerings but those which are lame and blind. "The least sheaf he ever culls out for tithe; and to rob God holds it the best pastime, the clearest gain."§ As a necessary result, he

* Prov. vii. 27. † Joshua vi. 19. ‡ Mal. iii. 9.

§ Bishop Hall on the Covetous Man.

seldom derives any benefit from the preaching of the Gospel or the administration of its ordinances; for it is an adage, founded in experience, that persons seldom value or profit by that which costs them nothing. The covetous man may be a man of intelligence, a high-sounding professor of religion, a man who can talk fluently upon Divine things; but he is a hollow hypocrite, whose character and doom an inspired apostle has pronounced: "No covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."*

Achan's covetousness brought down the Divine displeasure upon his people, as well as the heaviest judgments upon himself.—"Achan, the son of Carmi, took of the accursed thing; and the anger of the Lord was kindled AGAINST THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL."† You have already been reminded of his own punishment: he was stoned to death, and all that he had burned with fire.

These facts impressively show that church-members who commit iniquity kindle the anger of God, not only against themselves, but against the whole church to which they belong. However it may be should the sin remain undiscovered, it

* Ephes. v. 5.

† Joshua vii. 1.

cannot but array "the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness" against the entire community, if the guilty individual be detected and yet tolerated among them. St. Paul's mandate to the Corinthian church, for that reason, was, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."* This discipline was enjoined not merely for the purity and prosperity of the church, but in very faithfulness to the offender himself, "that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." It sometimes happens, as in the case of Achan, that church-discipline, righteously exercised, has the marked concurrence of Divine Providence, as seen by its inflictions. I remember a striking instance of this. An office-bearer of a Christian church in —, urged on by this all-grasping covetousness, over-reached and defrauded another in a business-transaction. The sin was greatly aggravated by its circumstances. After a patient investigation by his church-court, he was cut off from church-communion. Soon after, he was seized with an inflammatory illness, and hurried into eternity, after having suffered indescribable agony of mind and body.

* 1 Cor. v. 13.

How many examples beside might be adduced to justify and enforce our Lord's warning, so much forgotten: "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth!"*

* Luke xii. 15.

CHAPTER VIII.

Envy.

THE grammatical meaning of envy explains its nature. It is from *invidia*, (L.,)* “*in* and *video*, to look sharply after: hence, to watch another man’s fortunes. To observe another’s happiness or excellence with hatred or grief; to grudge; to feel pain at another’s good.”† It is defined to be “a sensation of uneasiness and disquiet, arising from the advantages which others are supposed to possess above us, accompanied with malignity towards those who possess them.”‡ It is “a repining at the prosperity or good of another, or anger or displeasure at any good of another which we want, or any advantage which another hath above us.”§

Again, “it is an evil affection of the heart, which makes men grieve and fret at the good

* Bailey.

† London Cyclopædia.

‡ Buck.

§ Ray on the Creation.

and prosperity of others."* It is justly regarded as one of the blackest passions in the human heart. And it is so odious, that those under its influence are studiously careful to conceal it. In Milton's view it is a diabolic passion. He describes Satan as being the subject of it when he saw the happiness of our first parents in Eden :

" Aside the devil turn'd
For envy ; yet with jealous leer malign
Eyed them askance."†

It seems a worse passion than anger, or even settled wrath. " Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous ; but who is able to stand before envy ? "‡

It is a *self-injurious* passion.—" Envy is the rottenness of the bones."§ " Envy slayeth the silly one."||

" None think the great unhappy, but the great.
Fools gaze and envy ; envy darts its sting,
Which makes a swain as wretched as a king."¶

" If envy, like anger, did not burn itself in its own fire, and consume and destroy those persons it possesses, before it can destroy those it wishes

* Cruden. † Paradise Lost. ‡ Prov. xxvii. 4.
§ Prov. xiv. 30. || Job v. 2. ¶ Young.

worst to, it would set the whole world on fire, and leave the most excellent persons the most miserable."* It is a cruel passion; regardless of the character, health, happiness, or even *life* of others. It is related of Dionysius the Tyrant, that he punished Philoxenus the musician because he could sing, and Plato the philosopher because he could dispute, better than himself.† And of Cambyeses, king of Persia, that he slew his brother Smerdis out of envy, because he could draw a stronger bow than himself or any of his followers. The monster Caligula also slew his brother because he was a beautiful young man.‡

You will do well to remember that the chief priests "delivered" our Lord to be crucified "for envy," because of those qualities and acts which made Him so great a favourite with "the common people."§

Instances of this "vile affection" are of constant occurrence. Sometimes, as you know, it manifests itself at school. A boy or girl, by application or superior talent, is successful, and obtains a reward. The indolent or less-gifted

* Clarendon.

† Cheever's *Cyclopedia of Religious Anecdote*, p. 108.

‡ Ibid.

§ Mark xv. 10.

scholar, in consequence, is "moved with envy." One man, by attention and obliging manners, as well as by other means, "drives a good trade;" while, for this reason, the evil spirit of envy rankles in the breast of his less-prosperous neighbour. Another, it may be an office-bearer in the church, has received superior spiritual endowments, is more highly gifted, and therefore has a larger share of public attention and favour; but this his less-popular brother cannot bear, who therefore becomes a fit emblem of "the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." *

One of the most impressive examples of the nature and fruits of this base passion, recorded in Scripture, is that of KING SAUL. His history is full of instructive incident. The Israelites had become dissatisfied with their form of government, which was a Theocracy—a government by God Himself; and they said to SAMUEL, "Make us a king to judge us, like all the nations." This request they repeatedly urged until it became a demand.† The sequel shows that it is wrong to pray for temporal things absolutely, or without qualification. God was displeased with the

* Isaiah lvii. 20.

† 1 Sam. viii.

reasons and manner of the request; for He says, "I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath." *

Saul, there is reason to believe, was once a happy man, and of a generous nature. His carriage towards some who treated him with contempt was meek and forgiving, when it was in his power, as king, to punish them. After his signal victory over the Ammonites, when a desire was expressed to have those put to death who said, "Shall Saul reign over us?" he pardoned the disaffected with *more* than royal clemency, and with devout gratitude ascribed the victory to God: "To-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel." †

But, becoming a prey to envy, he made himself one of the most miserable of men. The malignant passion seems to have been generated by David's popularity as a warrior: "The women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what

* Hosea xiii. 11.

† 1 Sam. xi. 13.

can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul **HYED** David from that day forward."* Yet, previously, David was in high favour with his royal master: "David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer;"† a proof that the envied person may have been once greatly loved.

Once abandoned to the passion under consideration, the heart of Saul became the seat of continual discontent, agitation, and conflict. Now timid and trembling with dread of his enemies; now overcome with rage at his disappointments; now sunk in gloomy melancholy; now racked with jealousy; now tortured with despair; forsaken of God; a self-tormentor; life a burden; and no brighter prospect beyond the grave. Such are the bitter fruits of envy. The heart which yields to its sway must ever be the home of deep, constant disquietude and wretchedness.

You have been already reminded that this is a *murderous* passion. It is utterly reckless of consequences, as is still farther illustrated in the history of Saul. Under its deadly influence, the unhappy monarch had recourse to the foulest treachery and dissimulation to compass David's

* 1 Sam. xviii. 7—9. † 1 Sam. xvi. 21.

ruin. He brought him to his house to play on the harp for him, but took the opportunity to cast the javelin at him, saying, "I will smite David even to the wall."* Twice he made this malignant attempt. He proposed to give him his eldest daughter in marriage on condition that David would make war against the Philistines, entertaining a malicious hope that he might be slain in battle. Having been disappointed of his hope, he violated his promise; but afterwards did actually give him his younger daughter, stipulating for the death of a hundred Philistines as the terms of his consent. "But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines."† Not only did he seek the life of David, but he murdered Ahimelech the priest and upwards of eighty other priests of the house of Eli. Nor did this satisfy him: "He smote Nob, the city of the priests, with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, oxen, and asses, and sheep,"—merely because Ahimelech showed hospitality and kindness to David.‡

This infernal passion made the heart of Saul the abode of an evil spirit. He may, therefore, be said to have carried a hell within

* 1 Sam. xviii. 11. † 1 Sam. xviii. 25. ‡ 1 Sam. xxii.

him wherever he went. How could it have been otherwise? Had David conspired to dethrone him, he might then have had some ground for his dislike; but it was worse than if it had been causeless, for *David's virtues and prosperity alone rendered him intolerable to the king*. Thus Saul exhibits human nature in one of its worst forms; for it is truly diabolical to hate goodness.

BISHOP HALL gives a graphic description of an envious man: "He is an enemy to God's favours, if they fall beside himself; the best nurse of ill fame; a man of the worst diet, for he consumes himself, and delights in pining; a thorn-hedge covered with nettles; a peevish interpreter of good things; and no other than a lean and pale carcase, quickened with a fiend."*

There is a remedy for this dire evil. The study of its odious features, its criminal nature, the unhappiness it produces, the mischiefs it occasions, the causes that nourish it, our own unworthiness of the blessings we enjoy, and other similar considerations, with prayer for deliverance from the evil, may be a *corrective*, but they do not constitute a radical cure. The only effectual remedy is the "LOVE" of a renewed heart which

* Character of Vices.

“envieth not,” of which St. Paul gives such high character.* Possessing and exemplifying you will rejoice as much at the honour & happiness of others as in your own. May G grant you this grace!

* 1 Cor. xiii.

CHAPTER IX.

Churlishness.

THIS vice is a combination of rudeness, brutality, selfishness, and avarice.* The example selected for illustration is that of NABAL, of whom this unenviable description is handed down to posterity: "The man was churlish and evil in his doings."†

The wise and noble-minded Abigail was, indeed, unequally yoked in being the wife of one so totally dissimilar in mind, in disposition, and sentiment; for Nabal, though a man of wealth, was of a sordid and grovelling disposition.

It could hardly be that he was the man of her choice. Probably she was obliged to submit to the decision of others, and thus became the wife of Nabal against her will. Customs in those times were different from the present, and the choice of people in marrying was not so much con-

* Walker.

† 1 Sam. xxv. 3.

sulted as now. In such matters,—as is still the case in heathen countries,—parents usually acted with arbitrary sway.

There is reason to fear that this selection was made for Abigail on the score of his riches. Matthew Henry makes the reflection: “Many a child is thrown away upon a great heap of the mire of worldly wealth; married to *that*, and to nothing else that is desirable.”* Abigail is described by the sacred writer as “a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance.” She was hospitable and courteous withal. And still the anomaly may be seen of such women united in marriage to men directly the opposite in mind and manners. “Many an Abigail is tied to a Nabal; and if so, be her understanding, like Abigail’s, ever so great, it will be little enough for her exercises.”†

David, the servant of God, was a lover of his country and of his people, and had done to both essential service. He was now reduced, through the unrelenting persecution of Saul, to great straits; and, to obtain a supply for himself and his followers, he sent ten of his young men with a polite and respectful request to Nabal. This was

* Commentary.

† Ibid.

at the joyous time of sheep-shearing, when he hoped Nabal's heart would yield to emotions of sympathy and generosity. Instead of this, he received them with characteristic roughness and incivility : more than that, his reply was cruel and insulting ; especially so, considering all the circumstances of the case : " Who is David ? and who is the son of Jesse ? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be ? " *

The situation of David at this time may remind you of the circumstances of Missionaries in foreign lands. He was a servant of God : so are they. He was the servant of his country : so are they, in various ways. He was now distant from his former home : so are they. He stood in need of supplies : so do they. Application was made to one who could furnish them ; but he roughly and cruelly refused. Alas ! here, too, you may find a parallel. How often are zealous and self-denying Missionary collectors repulsed from the doors of the wealthy, with a rudeness in manner

* 1 Sam. xxv. 10, 11.

and act akin to that of Nabal! Let me now call your attention to the qualities and fruits of that disposition, as evidenced by him.

Nabal's churlishness exhibited an unbecoming forgetfulness of benefits received.—David reminds him by his messengers of the protection given to his shepherds and flocks while he and his men were in Carmel. This one of Nabal's young men gratefully acknowledged to Abigail: "The men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt" (by wild beasts or wandering hordes of banditti), "neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: they were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep."* Nabal was not ignorant of all this; but his reply to the messengers discovers a base insensibility of these services.

When in circumstances to respond to the call, you, my young friends, will no doubt be solicited for money to carry on evangelizing operations in heathen lands. Uncivilly to receive the applicants, and ungenerously to deny them, would argue a base ingratitude for Gospel blessings vouchsafed to you and yours. If Nabal was

* 1 Sam. xxv. 14—17.

David's debtor for the reasons assigned, you owe much more to "the ministry of the word" which has pre-eminently proved a wall to you by night and by day,—protecting you and those you love from the incursion of insidious temptations, of cruel foes. How suitable the inquiry, therefore, "My soul, how much owest thou unto my Lord?" And how reasonable a service to aid, according to your ability, in sending that Gospel, whose privileges you have enjoyed, to every kindred, and nation, and people, and tongue!

Nabal's churlishness prompted language the most unfeeling and untruthful.—He boldly insinuates that David acted the part of an unfaithful and dishonest servant; that, in violation of all trust and obligation, he broke away from his master. This was a clumsy invention; for he must have heard of Saul's implacable enmity towards David, and of the repeated murderous attempts he made upon his life. The language employed was a wilful aspersion upon David's character; an ungenerous calumny. It is not an unreasonable assumption that he uttered this libel as an excuse to justify his rude refusal. Many imitate his surly example when applied to for subscriptions on behalf of benevolent institutions. They are fruitful in

objections and *inventions*. They sometimes insinuate that the money is obtained under false pretences, and dishonestly appropriated. I knew an instance in which an estimable collector was thus repulsed.

Sometimes licentious naval and military men, or other godless travellers, bring home a false report of Missionaries and their labours, and gruffly refuse to contribute for the purpose of heathen evangelization. According to them, the motives of Missionaries are dishonest, and their proceedings injurious : in a word, they are an insufferable nuisance in all countries whither they have gone. The secret most likely is, that the Missionaries were a terror to those evil-doers in the places where they visited, and thus provoked their ire. These unfounded censures are sometimes *adopted* by selfish persons, to cover or vindicate their illiberality. I hope better things of you, my young friends, than that you should ever resort to any such unworthy subterfuge, and thus evade an urgent and plain duty.

Nabal's churlishness deprived him of the luxury of doing good, and thus rendered himself as well as others unhappy.—"For God giveth to a man that

is good" (bounteous) "in His sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy."* Such joy is transcendent :

" All worldly joys are less
Than this one joy of doing kindnesses."

Had Nabal sent to David the five sheep which Abigail afterwards brought in alarm, they would not have been missed out of his three thousand, and he would have been richly rewarded by having relieved the necessities of an eminent servant of the Lord. Such an act is twice blessed :

" It blesses him who gives and him who takes."

All Nabal's family would, in that case, have literally shared "the blessing of him that was ready to perish."† But what a deep wound did his boorish conduct inflict upon the feelings of the Lord's "anointed;" and what distress and fear did it produce in the hearts of Abigail and her domestics! Of necessity also it rendered himself wretched; for to be miserly is, of natural consequence, to be miserable. "Miser now signifies, not an unhappy, but a *covetous* man; yet *misery* now signifies, not covetousness, but unhappiness."‡ Miser was a term formerly used in reference to a

* Eccles. ii. 26. † Job xxix. 13., ‡ Johnson.

person in wretchedness or calamity. Hence it is the root of our word "misery." Let me present you with POLLOCK's picture of such an one :

"The miser who with dust inanimate
Held wedded intercourse. Ill-guided wretch !
Thou might'st have seen him bending o'er his heaps,
And holding strange communion with his gold !
And as his thievish fancy seem'd to hear
The night-man's foot approach, starting alarm'd,
And in his old decrepit, wither'd hand,
That palsy shook, grasping the yellow earth
To make it sure. Of all God made upright,
And in their nostrils breathed a living soul,
Most fallen, most prone, most earthly, most debased ;
Of all that sold Eternity for Time,
None bargain'd on so easy terms with death.
Illustrious fool ! nay, most inhuman wretch !
He sat among his bags, and, with a look
Which hell might be ashamed of, drove the poor
Away unalmshoused ; and 'midst abundance died,
Sorest of evils ! died of utter want." *

Nabal's churlishness led him into a fatal mistake in speaking of his possessions as if he were the sole and irresponsible owner and disposer of them.—
"Shall I then take MY bread, and MY water,
and MY flesh that I have killed for my shearers,
and give them unto men whom I know not whence

* Course of Time.

they be?" He was not properly the owner, but only the steward, of these possessions. Whenever applications are made to you for benevolent purposes, it will be necessary for you to remember that none of the things you possess are your own. They are the property of God, lent to you, not to abuse, but to use for His glory. The apostle expressly teaches that the noble object to be aimed at in seeking wealth is, not to hoard, but that you may "HAVE TO GIVE."* This alone can legalize the desire to increase one talent of riches to two, or to multiply five to ten. To act otherwise, and from other motives, is to incur the condemnation of him who hid his Lord's money. Occupy, therefore, till He come, as the stewards of God, employing His goods in His service, by using them for the benefit of His creatures, ever remembering that you must give

"A strict account at last."

Nabal's churlishness, lastly, received its merited punishment, in the loss at once both of his possessions and his life.—His death was judicial. With solemn emphasis it is said, "The Lord smote Nabal that he died." This will bring to your remembrance the admonitory question put to the rich

* Eph. iv. 28.

fool : "Then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?"* And the saying of the wise man : "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth ; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty."† The forfeiture of life as well as property is sometimes the penalty of this sin. This is necessarily, as well as judicially, the case. Through pining care and wasting toil, eager to reach a position of affluence, some persons sap the foundations of health, and bring themselves to a premature grave,—thus presenting to view the "sore evil" of amassing riches without "power to eat thereof," but having to leave them, perhaps, to a prodigal son or thankless relations to enjoy or squander !

The lesson I would inculcate, in conclusion, is one which the subject obviously suggests. To escape the evils of churlishness, if you have it not already, ask of God—and then, by grace, cultivate, cherish, and manifest—the *contrary disposition*.

* Luke xii. 20. † Prov. xi. 24.

CHAPTER X.

Filial Impiety.

By filial impiety I mean disobedience to parents, and all other forms of ill conduct in children. ABSALOM is our illustration ; of whom it is said, "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty : . . . there was no blemish in him."*

Beauty of countenance often passes for more than it is worth. A pretty face too frequently hides vile principles, tempers, and conduct. Hence the expression, "A smooth-faced villain." In all Israel there was not such beauty as that of Absalom. In all Israel, perhaps, there was not one with so little to praise beside ; for his beauty seems to have been the only commendable quality in him. This fact will serve to give you correct views on what is naturally interesting to young people,—the subject of beauty. The case of Absalom

* 2 Sam. xiv. 25.

shows that a remarkably handsome countenance may be associated with an abominably bad disposition, and practices the most criminal and revolting.

A judicious and faithful monitress of youth makes the following just remarks :—"There are different kinds of personal beauty ; amongst which that of form and colouring holds a very inferior rank. There is a beauty of expression, for instance ; of sweetness, of nobility, of intellectual refinement, of feeling, of animation, of meekness, of resignation, and many other kinds of beauty, which may all be allied to the plainest features, and yet may remain, to give pleasure long after the blooming cheek has faded, and silver grey has mingled with the hair."* Again : "There are plain women sometimes met with in society, every movement of whose features is instinct with intelligence ; who, from the genuine heart-warm smiles which play about the mouth, the sweetly modulated voice, and the lighting up of an eye that looks as if it could comprehend the universe, become perfectly beautiful to those who understand them, and still more to those who live with them and love them. Before such pretensions to

* Daughters of England, by Mrs. Ellis, p. 173.

beauty as these, how soon do the pink and white of a merely pretty face vanish into nothing!" *

Absalom's beauty ministered, in no small degree, to his vanity. This appears from the attention he paid to his hair; which he must have preserved carefully, for he had it polled, or cut, but once a year. He must therefore have spent much time, and taken great pains, to have it always elegantly and tastefully arranged. Some young persons, vain of their hair, like Absalom, lose many a precious hour in its adjustment and decoration.

Absalom's pride and vanity seem to have been fostered by his descent. He was of royal line by his mother's as well as by his father's side,—the son of Maachah, daughter of the King of Jeshur. It might be that for this reason he thought he had stronger claims to the throne than his father, who was *only* the son of Jesse. Alas! how prone are vain persons to pride themselves in their family connexions, and to boast that they are of gentle, noble, or royal blood!

David, doubtless, was foolishly fond of Absalom. Hence he supplied him, from time to time, with those things which became incentives to pride,

* Daughters of England, p. 175.

which brought himself into great and sore troubles, and ultimately proved his son's ruin. As a murderer, Absalom had no right to expect leniency more than any other subject. But David, in his excessive partiality, not only recalled him from banishment, not only restored him to liberty from being a prisoner in Jerusalem, but took him to his embraces, and permitted him to assume more of kingly style and splendour than himself. He allowed Absalom to prepare him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. Such ill-deserved and mis-placed indulgence could not fail to meet its own punishment. Excessive fondness in parents is usually ill-requited in children. Many examples could be given. Let one suffice. I knew an aged couple who had an only son. This boy, the idol of their hearts from childhood, was permitted to have his own way *unrestrained*, until, as he grew up, his obstinacy and self-will became uncontrollable. He was put apprentice to learn a trade; but, not liking work, he soon ran away from his master, and enlisted. Twice his father paid the amount necessary for his release, hoping by kindness to prevail on him to finish his apprenticeship. All was in vain. A third time he stole off, and enlisted. His father and mother went to

see him ; but on the way the horse took fright and ran off, throwing his father on his head with great violence, which for months deprived him of his reason. The too-partial mother, after all, bought him out again ; but it was only to add to her sorrows. Having lost the situation her husband was no longer able to hold, her unnatural son again fled, and she died broken-hearted.

Restless ambition was another ingredient in Absalom's character. He aspired to the regal dignity. To arrive at this, what plausible and apparently *just* fault did he find with the administration of affairs ! what soothing professions did he make of compassion for the oppressed and suffering people, and of patriotic motives and objects ! Like those hollow demagogues whose "tongue walketh through the earth" in calumny, vituperation, seditious libels, and inflammatory harangues, but whose real aim is to serve themselves,—to mount to place, or power, or great wealth. It is well when people have penetration to detect such hypocrisy !

It has been observed that ambitious men do not reach the pinnacle of their lawless desires, without first meanly submitting to abasement and humiliation. This is especially the case where

the success of their projects depends on the popular will. To accomplish his designs, Absalom had to descend from his princely bearing, and come upon a level, upon terms of unbecoming familiarity, with *all* classes who applied to him for justice! To attain his ends, also, he had to violate every principle of truth; to call evil good, and good evil; saying to those of whose cause he obtained only a one-sided and hasty view, "Thy matters are good and right," and insinuating that his father was indifferent to their interests: "There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee."* The crime which brands the character and memory of Absalom with the deepest infamy is his FILIAL IMPIETY.

The first instance of that impiety which I shall notice is the murder of his brother Amnon.—Admitting that Amnon deserved capital punishment, Absalom took too much upon him in becoming his judge, jury, and, in a sense, his executioner. It is no excuse to say that he only revenged his sister's injured honour. Absalom sought the throne. There is therefore ground to suspect that his ambition to reign, not merely his resentment, had some hand in procuring the

* 2 Sam. xv. 3.

death of Amnon, *David's eldest son*. Ambitious men have ever signalized themselves by acts of cruelty to those whom they regarded as rivals, or whom they judged likely to thwart their purposes. Your knowledge of history, sacred and civil, will furnish you with numerous instances.


The judicial decision upon the case, as well as the punishment of the criminal, properly rested with David. Absalom assumed authority which did not belong to him, and, as it were, wrested the reins of government out of his father's hands. In doing so, what contemptuous disrespect did he manifest towards his venerable parent! How cruelly did he lacerate his feelings, already so deeply wounded! It was not enough, in the estimation of this graceless youth, that the domestic peace of David had received such a dreadful stab by Amnon's sin, but *he* must add another, if possible, still more fatal.

To such impiety let not your conduct ever exhibit the slightest approach. If insulted or injured, either in imagination or reality, at any time, by other members of the family, let your parents judge between you, and with implicit deference bow to their decision and will; and if, in your conviction, their decision be erroneous,

meekly refer the matter in prayer to HIM who judgeth righteously, and who will deal with it accordingly.

Absalom's filial impiety was expressed, in no doubtful manner, by his ingratitude for parental favours.—He shared very largely in David's affection. Let me recall some instances of this to your recollection. When in banishment on account of the assassination of Amnon, "the soul of King David longed to go forth unto Absalom." Here his detestation of the murder seems lost in fondness for the son.

When the widow of Tekoah, by her ingenious tale, applied for Absalom's recall, David, longing for the event, and requiring no farther entreaty, gave instant orders to Joab for that purpose. On Absalom's return to Jerusalem, it is true he did not see his father's face for two full years, remaining a prisoner at large in his own house, thus preserving at least the appearance of justice. But again, on the mediation of Joab, with apparent joy, not merely without reluctance, David admits Absalom into his presence; and, by a kiss of reconciliation, passes an act of oblivion on the past! This was not all. He heaped upon him caresses and endearments such as Absalom



could scarcely have expected, had he been the most deserving of children. O, what vile returns did he make for all !

It will be difficult, if not impossible, for you, my young friends, to cherish a *due* sense of benefits received from Christian parents. Their claims upon you are affecting and innumerable. In your infancy you were the objects of their special and tender regard. *Then*, usually, parents are,

“Like Jacob, fondest of the youngest born.”

If, since, you have not been distinguished by any marks of favouritism, their debtors you are none the less. Can you ever adequately reward them for watchful and often wakeful care over you in childhood ; for subsequent tuition, guidance, provision, protection, salutary restraint,—to say nothing of peculiar spiritual advantages ? O that you may requite all their care, and pains, and studies with becoming gratitude !

Absalom's filial impiety was manifested by the treachery with which he executed his plans.—He invited Amnon to the festivities of his sheep-shearing at Baalhazor with the horrid intention to have him assassinated. How must the king have shuddered afterwards at the diabolical

cunning with which he *first* invited himself and servants, secretly hoping, no doubt, that the request would be declined; and at the urgency with which he then entreated that, *at least*, Amnon might be permitted to come to the feast!

The perfidy which lay concealed under his apparently *contrite* desire to be reconciled to his father is one of the worst traits in his character. He was anxious to get into David's good graces, that he might dethrone him with the greater facility. "Now therefore," said the artful hypocrite, "let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me!" He longs to see the king's face, pretending it was because he loved him, but really to contrive how he might supplant him. "He cannot do his father a mischief, till he is reconciled to him. This snake cannot sting again, till he be warmed in his father's bosom."*

The same treachery is conspicuous in his counterfeit carriage at the gate of justice, where, by a show of humility, condescension, and mercy, this masked villain stole the hearts and allegiance of the men of Israel from his fondly-indulgent father, his and their rightful sovereign!

* Matthew Henry.

His assuming the garb of religion for a cloak of covetousness, and to impose upon his good father, is the climax of his wickedness. Under pretence of a vow he professes to have made at Geshur, that "if the Lord would bring him again to Jerusalem, then he would serve the Lord," he asks permission to go to Hebron for that purpose. His father, delighted at those evidences of *grace*, as he thought, in his son, gladly gave him leave, saying, "Go in peace." In this instance, Absalom behaved like Satan, who transforms himself into an angel of light, the more effectually to deceive, and thus accomplish his purposes without obstacle or detection. My young friends, come not you into the secret of those adepts in vice who hide their foul designs under feigned blandness and affection towards their parents, or assumed appearances of piety.

The last expression of Absalom's filial impiety we shall notice is his unnatural rebellion.—Rebellion against a father is spoken of by God as an unequalled crime in a child: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for . . . I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me."* As if He would say, "Attend,

* Isaiah i. 2.

ye angels! give ear, children of men! and find Me, if you can, a parallel for this baseness, a crime to equal rebellion against a fond father."

Absalom rebelled against his father's authority, by undermining it; against his personal and domestic peace, by following the revolting counsel of Ahithophel; against his crown, by using every stratagem to place it on his own unworthy head; and against his *life*, by taking up arms and entering the field to deprive him of it.

Absalom did not, and could not, escape the righteous judgment of God. His end was not the common death of all men. It was not an ordinary fate which awaited such an uncommon criminal. The *manner* of his death was so unusual and unlikely, that you cannot but see the punitive hand of God in it. Riding furiously to escape from the servants of David whom he met, he went under a great oak, one of the boughs of which, a forked bough it would seem, "caught hold of his head,"—either became entangled in his hair, or, which is more likely, from the circumstance that life was nearly extinct when he was discovered, griped his neck. Thus he was suspended between heaven and earth, as if "earth would not keep him, heaven would not

take him, and hell opened her mouth to receive him."* In that position he was "thrust through the heart" by Joab.

Many examples might be adduced to show that the righteous anger of God is sure to overtake those guilty of rebellion against the will, authority, peace, and *life* of their parents; but one so admonitory and impressive I could not select as that of unhappy Absalom.

* Henry.

CHAPTER XI.

Sinful Pleasures.

IF you ask, What pleasures are innocent, and what sinful? the WORD OF GOD, which is the sole and sufficient rule of our faith and practice, will shed a full light upon the question. Writing to the Colossians, Paul says, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."* And he counsels the Corinthians, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."† The pleasures, therefore, which you may not enjoy in the name of the Lord Jesus, and to the glory of God, cannot be innocent, and must be sinful.

"The pleasures of sin" may be those of the intellect. Can you be guiltless, and revel in books which undermine Christian principle, pollute the imagination, and corrupt the heart? "Beware of bad books. The world is flooded with

* Colos. iii. 17.

† 1 Cor. x. 31.

such books. Under the moral government of God, while in this state of probation, we are to be surrounded with temptations of every kind. Books could be named—were it not that there is a possibility that even the information conveyed in naming them might be perverted and used to obtain them—which, seemingly, could not be excelled by all the talents in hell, if the object were to pollute and to ruin. They are to be found everywhere. I do entreat my young readers never to look at one; never to open one. They will leave a stain upon the soul which can never be removed. If you have an enemy whose soul you would visit with a heavy vengeance, and into whose heart you would place vipers which would live, and crawl, and torment him through life, and whose damnation you would seal up for the eternal world, you have only to place one of these destroyers in his hand. What shall be said of such works as those of Byron? May not a man read those? Can he not learn things from him which cannot be learned elsewhere? I reply, Yes; just as you would learn, while treading in burning lava, what could not be learned elsewhere. But would the knowledge thus obtained be worth the agony of the

fire, and the scars which would remain through life? There are beautiful pearls in the slimy bottom of the ocean, but they are to be found only here and there; and would you feel it worth your while to dive after them, if there were many probabilities that you would stick and die in the mud in which they are imbedded? Is he a benefactor to his species, who here and there throws out a beautiful thought, or a poetic image; but, as you stoop to pick it up, chains upon you a putrid carcase which you can never throw off? I believe a single page may be selected from Byron, which has done more hurt to the mind and heart of the young than all his writings have ever done good. But he is doomed to be exiled from the libraries of all virtuous men.”*

While some enjoyments derived through the eye, the ear, the taste, the touch, are not only harmless, but beneficial, the scriptures quoted at the commencement of this chapter will clearly indicate to you what pleasures of sense are sinful. In this category we include the races, the theatre, cards, and such like. The evil of these is in their *surroundings*, the danger is in their *tendency*.

* Todd's Student's Guide, p. 221. See also his remarks on works of fiction, p. 222.

Our Lord's figure will apply here. THE TREE IS KNOWN TO BE CORRUPT, BECAUSE THE FRUIT IS CORRUPT.* If the influence—the effect of such amusements—be not to make better sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, better servants or masters, better citizens, or *better Christians*, then, according to the Great Teacher, the tree is not good, inasmuch as the fruit is not good.

“Gambling is, perhaps, the most exciting, absorbing, irregular passion of which the human mind is capable; it subdues the whole man, body, soul, and spirit; age cannot quench the desire, nor stop the practice; remorse, which may sometimes make the drunkard sober, seems unable to procure a lodgment in the practised gamester's heart. The vice is so utterly hateful, the man abandoned to it is so like a fiend, without love, without pity, without compassion, without one generous emotion, without natural affection or domestic charity, that the first step towards becoming such a living, walking, suffering incarnation of the spirit of hell, should be shunned as we would shun the plague.”† *If so, then those parents take the safest side who exclude cards, and*

* Matt vii. 17.

† Corderoy's Lecture on Popular Amusements.

all games which excite a passion for gambling, from their dwellings.

Card-playing was regarded as a degradation to the human intellect, and so described by no mean authority a hundred years ago: "I must confess I think it is below reasonable creatures to be altogether conversant in such diversions as are merely innocent, and have nothing else to recommend them but that there is no hurt in them. Whether any kind of gaming has even thus much to say for itself, I shall not determine; but I think it very wonderful to see persons of the best sense passing away time, a dozen together, in shuffling and dividing a pack of cards, with no other conversation but what is made up of a few game-phrases, and no other ideas but those of black or red spots ranged together in different figures. Would not a man laugh to hear one of this species complain that life is short?"*

History relates that cards were invented for the amusement of an insane king. It is recorded of Locke, the philosopher, that having been introduced by Lord Shaftesbury to the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Halifax, instead of conversing with him, as he expected, on literary

* Spectator.

subjects, the three noblemen sat down to cards. Locke, after looking on for some time, pulled out his pocket-book, and began to write. One, observing this, took the liberty of asking what he was writing: "My Lord," said Locke, "I am endeavouring to profit by my present situation: for, having waited with impatience for the honour of being in company with the greatest men of the age, I thought I could do nothing better than write down your conversation; and I have set down the substance of what you have said this last hour or two." This well-timed ridicule had its desired effect. Of the Right Hon. WILLIAM PITT, Prime Minister of England, a high testimony is given: "His example was praiseworthy, in an age and among statesmen remarkable for dissipation. Gambling was then a passion. It was the usual diversion at the clubs. Fox contracted, by gambling, enormous debts. Gambling was sanctioned by princely examples. The young Pitt touched cards, tasted their allurements, and threw them down."*

The REV. WILLIAM ROMAINE was one evening invited to a friend's house to tea, and, after the tea-things were removed, the lady of the house

* Christian Observer.

asked him to play at cards, to which he made no objection. The cards were produced; and, when all were ready to commence play, the venerable minister said, "Let us ask the blessing of God!" "Ask the blessing of God!" said the lady, in great surprise: "I never heard of such a thing to a game of cards." Mr. Romaine then inquired, "Ought we to engage in anything on which we cannot ask His blessing?" The gentle reproof was effectual.*

- Some have had the hardihood to become
- the advocates of the theatre as an instructor in morals; as the handmaid of religion! The theatre a teacher of virtue! The theatre a promoter of piety! It could not be a school of morals, even if managers and actors desired it. The mass of the people must be pleased; the plays suited to their wishes. Should the arrangements offend by their purity, the house is deserted. Hence the evil of pandering to the depraved public taste has become chronic. Playgoers and players act and re-act upon each other. The theatre, therefore, instead of teaching virtue, has notoriously become a school of vice. A French admirer of the stage consistently

* See "Card-playing," *Cyclopedia of Religious Anecdote*.

abandoned the idea of defending it on the ground taken by English advocates ; namely, that it was a teacher of morals. In one of his works he says, "You have nothing to do with morality here ; this is not the place in which to learn it ; the stage was not erected for the promulgation of truth, but to flatter and amuse."* Melancholy facts confirm the correctness of this sentiment : "If the stage be right in its moral tone, how is it that a neighbourhood is invariably deteriorated by the presence of a theatre ? that no sooner is it erected and popular, than drinking-houses and supper-rooms abound, and brothels are multiplied ? Ask any builder who has purchased ground on which he intends to build respectable houses, which he would rather do, as a man of business, with a view to a profitable return,—*give* an ample site for the erection of a church and schools, or *sell* a site at double its original cost for the building of a playhouse ? And, if he intends to retain possession of the house-property, you will find that in his calculation it is much more profitable to give than to receive."† The original American Republic, in their legislative enactments, condemned theatrical entertainments,

* Rousseau.

† Corderoy.

horse-racing, and gaming, as being productive of idleness, dissipation, and general depravity. That such were the views of the truest patriots and wisest men of that Republic, reads a lesson to individuals as well as nations. The present Bishop of Carlisle has said that, in examining the books of a penitentiary, he was told, without any qualification, that the majority of the inmates who are seeking to recover their characters in these places were first seduced from the path of virtue at theatres, races, or tea-gardens.

To these testimonies we may add one more—that of a man whose praise is in all the churches as the counsellor and guide of youth: “All the evils that waste a young man’s property, corrupt his morals, blast his reputation, impair his health, embitter his life, and destroy his soul, lurk in the purlieus of a theatre. Vice, in every form, lives, moves, and has its being there: myriads have cursed the hour when they first exposed themselves to the contamination of the stage, and from that fatal evening they date their destruction. Then they threw off the restraints of education, and learned how to disregard the dictates of conscience: then their decision, hitherto oscillating between a life of virtue and of vice, was made up

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for the latter. Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other than the Bible and the play-book. If the one be good, the other must be evil ; if the Scriptures are to be obeyed, the theatre must be avoided. The only way to justify the stage is, as it has ever been, to condemn the Bible. The same individual cannot defend both."*

The fascinating and dangerous influence of forbidden pleasures is seen in the history of SOLOMON, than whom no one ever rose to such a height of wisdom, greatness, wealth, and honour. His wisdom was profound, yet was it not acquired by birth, education, or example. It was the miraculous gift of God. "The Lord appeared to him in a dream by night, and said, Ask what I shall give thee." His answer manifested no small degree of acquired wisdom. He did not ask for large dominions, or any of the things aspiring monarchs would have chosen. Perhaps, if the proposal were made to you, some of you would prefer pleasure, wealth, or fame, as your chief good. Not so Solomon. His answer is worthy the admiration and practical study, especially of the young, of all generations : "O Lord, my God,

* John Angell James.

Thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David my father ; and I am but a little child : I know not how to go out or come in. . . . Give therefore Thy servant AN UNDERSTANDING HEART.* This reply so pleased the Lord, that He not only gave him a wise and understanding heart, but also that which he had not asked, both riches and honour.†

Solomon was pre-eminently a learned man, and that not, as in the case of ordinary scholars, by studious application merely, but by Divine impartation. "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore. Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East country, and all the wisdom of Egypt; for he was wiser than all men."‡ Then follow the branches of knowledge in which he excelled : He was a moral *philosopher*, for "he spake three thousand proverbs;" a *poet*, "his songs were a thousand and five;" a *botanist*, "he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall;" a *zoographer*,—describing the nature and properties of animals,—“he spake also of

* 1 Kings iii. 7, 9. † Ibid, verses 11, 12, 13.

‡ 1 Kings iv. 29—31.

beasts;" an *ornithologist*, he spake "of fowl;" and a *natural historian*, for he spake "of creeping things and of fishes."*

He displayed "exceeding largeness of heart," not only in his intellectual acquirements, but in his *gifts*. His wealth was enormous. He "made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones."† He "exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches."‡ His liberality was in proportion to his wealth. What a stupendous monument of his munificence was the Temple! It has been calculated that it cost him a sum greatly exceeding the treasures of all the monarchs in Christendom!

That Solomon was at last overcome by temptations to indulge in the sinful pleasures of sense, is undeniably matter of fact, as well as of fair deduction: "King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love." This was an illicit affection; for "he had seven

* 1 Kings iv. 32, 33. † 2 Chron. i. 15.

‡ 1 Kings x. 23.

hundred wives, and three hundred concubines : and his wives turned away his heart. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice.”* He yielded also to the attraction of other unlawful pleasures, according to his own confessions : “I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure. . . . And whatsoever my eyes desired I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy.” Yet was he not happy ; for he adds, “All was vanity and vexation of spirit.”† These confessions he makes in the book which, it is considered by some, bears strong marks of his repentance after his departure from righteousness.‡

“Now all these things happened for ensamples ; and they are written for our admonition.”§ Here are impressive facts to show that, no matter how intelligent, learned, wise, honourable, or exalted, you are sure to incur the Divine displeasure and become the subject of deep “vexation of spirit,” should your heart be “turned away” from God by the pleasures of sin in any form. These pleasures, remember, are “but for a season :” duty

* 1 Kings xi. † Eccles. ii. ‡ Cobbin. § 1 Cor. x. 11.

interrupts them. "Man must labour and suffer, and can only occasionally enjoy his pleasures. Besides, the appetite for them palls. Spiritual pleasures follow us everywhere, and are the perpetual sunshine of the breast. Sinful pleasures are only for a season, because they are dissipated by reflection. This destroys them. The music becomes harsh in the ears of reflection; the laugh loses its power; the wit no longer sparkles; the delight no longer excites. The sight of a broken law, of a slighted Saviour, of approaching death and judgment, and of future and everlasting perdition, turns the pleasures of sin into wormwood and gall."* The pleasures of sin are embittered by trial. Affliction is more than palliated by spiritual pleasures. Religion is the fair tree which sweetens the bitter waters of life.† Death terminates the pleasures of sin. They will then be followed by sorrow, unmitigated by even an imaginary joy; succeeded by deep, unmingled, ever-during woe.

O, may yours be the happiness of him who finds and retains that religion, whose ways are uniformly ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths are peace!‡

* Richard Watson. † See Exod. xv. 23—25. ‡ Prov. iii.

CHAPTER XII.

Falsehood.

A LIE is "the speaking of a known falsehood, with a purpose to deceive."* It is "a breach of promise : for whoever seriously addresses his discourse to another, tacitly promises to speak the truth, because he knows that the truth is expected."† According to these definitions, a *mis- take* is not a *lie*, since a deliberate intention to deceive is essential to a falsehood ; and yet both are often confounded, and an *incorrect statement*—a statement not known to be incorrect—is frequently denominated a lie, and unjustly punished accordingly.

You have an example of the odious vice of lying in Gehazi, servant to the prophet Elisha. Rarely do you meet among Scripture personages a character so destitute of everything noble in principle and sentiment, and therefore so completely des-

* Baxter.

† Paley.

plicable, as Gehazi. You will find it difficult to discover a single excellence in him.

Naaman, having been healed of his leprosy, and anxious to make a becoming return to Elisha, requested him to take a blessing—an eastern phrase for gifts—at his hands. This the prophet peremptorily, and for sufficient reasons, refused. The temptation, however, was too suitable and powerful for the covetous Gehazi to resist. Determined to “take somewhat of this Syrian,” and, like all of similar disposition, regardless of consequences, he ran after Naaman, and solicited clothing and money, affirming that his master sent him. Having obtained more than he asked, like Achan, he hid them on his return, and then came in and stood before his master. “Whence comest thou, Gehazi?” said Elisha. Mark his answer,—incoherent, *false* upon the face of it, like that of many a truant youth, who to a similar question, with a fallen countenance, replies, “I went *nowhere*!”* He was at once convicted of a deliberate and impudent lie. “Went not my heart with thee?” said Elisha. Young people! be not deceived. If there be not a prophet’s heart to go with you, when about to imitate the crime of

* See 2 Kings v. 25.

Gehazi, *conscience* will go with you, and conscience is a revealer of secrets. More ; the eye of God will go with you, and He will not fail to bring to light the hidden things of darkness one day or other. In vain, therefore, do you “seek deep to hide your works, and say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?”* It will not be unprofitable minutely to survey the falsehood of Gehazi in its chief features :—

It was a sordid lie.—It was told to cover his sin in taking two talents of silver and two changes of garments from Naaman, which he had secreted. The same bad quality is conspicuous in the utter falsehoods by which he obtained these from the Syrian. The questions of Elisha make it conspicuous : “Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen?” which the prophet plainly saw he intended to purchase with the money. Many a lie is told for the purpose of dishonest gain. It is notorious that neither agricultural nor mercantile business is free from this hateful vice. Persons in the former line often offend in selling cattle, especially horses, whose faults they conceal and whose worth they extol, designedly to impose upon the

* Isaiah xxix. 15.

purchaser. In shops how often are the unwary deceived, while a price is asked and taken which is unjust, with perhaps earnest protestations that the article is given at, or under, first cost ! In other cases no second price is asked in profession : an *attractive* profession too ; for the words, in large and graceful letters, are placed in a prominent situation : but, alas, the practice falsifies the profession. These are nought else than execrable *Gehazian* lies !

It was a reiterated lie.—It is a familiar adage that “one lie draws ten more after it.” It was very nearly so in this case ; for the first Gehazi told to Naaman led to his telling six or seven others, verbal and practical, to hide his villany. Let this make its due impression on you. The first falsehood is almost sure to require others to make the assertion feasible, and often *more* than falsehoods. When unhappy PETER said he did not know Jesus, he at last *swore*—the word means he *imprecated*, invoked the curse of God, perhaps on himself, his Master, or on both—to prove his assertion true.

It was an aggravated lie.—It stained the character, and wounded the feelings, of his kind master, the Lord’s prophet, whom it represented

as acting from interested motives; and it brought reproach upon the religion of Jehovah, placing it on a level with the fraudulent and lying system of idolatry. Besides, the act of Gehazi was calculated to ruin the souls of Naaman and his attendants. Lastly, it was done under the inspection of the ALL-SEEING EYE, with the knowledge that he was doing wrong, and in felt opposition to the Divine will.

Should you imitate his sin, circumstances of still deeper aggravation must, of necessity, mark your conduct. Your religious advantages are superior to his; the dispensation under which you live is brighter; the system of religion you profess is loftier; the light that shines upon your path is clearer,—for you have the *whole* Bible. And the ministers of the Gospel may have been a greater blessing to you than even Elisha was to Gehazi. The commission of such crime by you would deeply grieve *their* hearts, but above all provoke to anger the GOOD BEING, the God of truth and purity.

The falsehood of Gehazi met with severe but just punishment.—"The leprosy therefore of Naaman," said Elisha, "cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever. And he went

out from his presence a leper as white as snow,"—covered with the leprosy in its worst form.

It ought to deter you from this crime to reflect that such "iniquity" in the "father" is often visited upon the "children." A proneness to this sin is not seldom betrayed by the offspring of even converted parents, whose propensity this was in their unregenerate state. The leprosy of *lying* cleaves to their seed after them. But the punishment of the sin is sometimes personal and immediate, exhibiting an awfully striking connexion between the offence and the penalty. This you will see by considering a New Testament example,—that of Ananias and Sapphira.

"A man may *act* a lie; as by pointing his finger in a wrong direction when a traveller inquires of him his road; or when a tradesman shuts up his windows, to induce his creditors to believe that he is abroad: for to all moral purposes, and therefore as to veracity, speech and action are the same; speech being only a mode of action." *

The falsehood of Ananias and Sapphira was of this character. The church was now happily

* Paley.

being provided against the effects of persecution which raged against it on every hand. A common fund was supplied by the property of the wealthier members. Some sold their estates, others their chattels, to meet the common want. Ananias, among others, having land, sold it, and brought part of the proceeds of sale to the apostles, pretending it was the whole. Perhaps he and his wife were lovers of money before they joined the church, and now it becomes a fatal snare to them. The sin of Ananias explains the nature also of a mental reservation. He suppressed *part* of the truth when he was *bound* to reveal the whole. His *act*, in bringing a part of the price for the whole, is what may be called a practical lie. Now attend to the aggravations of his sin.

It was committed under Satanic instigation.—“Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart?”* True, he was charged with having conceived the base purpose in his own heart; but it was Satanic in its origin. The evil desire thus suggested was conceived, and, the conception finished, it brought forth death.† The aggravation therefore was, that Ananias and Sapphira, members of the church, should commit such a daring act at

* Acts v. 3.

† See James i. 15.

the bidding of the wicked one. Here you see lying in its true colours. In the Scriptures it is described as having a worse source than even the human heart, desperately wicked as that heart is. The devil is said expressly to be the father of it; and all liars are, for that reason, called his children. "Ye are of your father the devil," said our Lord; "and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." * The lie of Ananias is almost a fac-simile of that by which Satan deceived our first parents. He told some truth, but suppressed what was necessary in order to accomplish his purpose.

"Why hath Satan FILLED thine heart?" † Then, whenever you *utter* or *act* an untruth, your heart is full of the devil! Richard Baxter says, "The proud, the malicious, and liars are, in a special sort, the children of the devil; for these three are in Scripture, in a special manner, made the devil's sins." Therefore he counsels, "If you love not the devil's sin and image, love not a lie." ‡

* John viii. 44. † Acts v. 3.

‡ Christian Directory, part i.

*By this act, Ananias and Sapphira sinned against themselves,—against their character, their peace, their life. Observe particularly that they damaged their own reputation. Though that act were permitted to go unpunished, who could trust them again? “A liar gets this by lying, that nobody will believe him when he speaks the truth.”**

*In thus acting, they sinned against one another.—*They “agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord.” The sin of one was that of both. Ananias, however, seems to have been first in the transgression, and to be, therefore, more blameworthy. Not that Sapphira was blameless; for she consented to her husband’s counsel and deed. Instead of agreeing, she should have urgently advised the upright course; and if that advice were not taken, she should have been, against his example and authority, resolutely good. Wives are to submit themselves unto their own husbands, but not in doing what the word of God says is wrong. This, then, is another circumstance that heightens their sin. Instead of being a help to each other, they were a mutual hindrance and curse. Let the young, who are married, deeply ponder this feature in the guilty transaction. To you it reads a lesson of

* Aristotle.

solemn warning. The moment you “agree together” to do wrong, that moment you consent, whether you consider it or not, not only to your own but to each other’s perdition !

By this act, Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the apostles.—How must such a sin have wrung the hearts of “Peter and the rest !” That all their care should be thus requited ! The malignity of open enemies was easy to be borne, compared to the treachery of these false friends. So a spoken or acted lie on your part would deeply wound those zealous and painstaking ministers under whose pastoral care you have been placed.

In so doing, they sinned against the church and cause of Christ.—Their hypocrisy, dissimulation, and falsehood might have done injury to Christianity, deep, wide, permanent, not to say irreparable, had they not been cut off by the righteous judgment of God. How forceful the remark I heard made once in a sermon : “Inconsistency in Christian professors has done more harm to Christianity than all the rage of infidelity, from the birth of CAIN to the death of PAINE !”

The lie of Ananias and Sapphira was a sin against the Holy Ghost.—Notwithstanding their numerous and weighty obligations to Him, they

lied to Him ; “or, rather, they *belied* the Holy Ghost,”* by speaking and acting contrary to His teaching and operations. To imitate their sin would be to vex and grieve the Holy Spirit, who is emphatically the Spirit of TRUTH.

Their punishment—for they “died by the visitation of God”—reminds me of the following inscription, to be seen in the market-place at Devizes :—“The Mayor and Corporation of Devizes avail themselves of the stability of this building, to transmit to future times the record of an awful event, which occurred in this market-place in the year 1753 ; hoping that such a record may serve as a salutary warning against the danger of impiously invoking the Divine vengeance, or of calling on the holy name of God, to conceal the devices of falsehood and fraud. On Thursday, the 25th of January, 1753, RUTH PIERCE, of Pottern, in this county, agreed with three other women to buy a sack of wheat in the market, each paying her due proportion towards the same. One of these women, in collecting the several quotas of money, discovered a deficiency, and demanded of Ruth Pierce the sum which was wanting to make good the amount. Ruth Pierce protested that she

* Lightfoot.

had paid her share, and said she wished she might drop down dead if she had not. She rashly repeated this awful wish ; when, to the consternation of the surrounding multitude, she instantly fell down and expired, having the money concealed in her hand !" *

You know the eternal doom of "all liars." † If you have been overtaken in such fault, in any form, seek pardon from God, through Christ, for this and all other "sins that are past." And in future yield a sincere obedience to the apostolic precept,—not the less important because it is familiar: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour." ‡

* Cheever's *Cyclopedia of Religious Anecdote*, p. 139.

† Rev. xxi. 8. ‡ Eph. iv. 25.

CHAPTER XIII.

Pride.

"PRIDE is inordinate and unreasonable self-esteem, attended with insolence and rude treatment of others."* The word, as used by our Lord in Mark vii. 22, signifies arrogance or contempt. Accordingly, "it is a lifting up of ourselves above the state or degree appointed us. It is an appearing to ourselves, and a desire to appear to others, above what we are, or above others of our quality."† Pride and vanity are not exactly the same. Vanity is talkative and boastful. The proud man, on the other hand, is naturally silent, and, wrapt up in his own importance, seldom speaks but to make his audience feel their inferiority. The fruits of pride are contempt and slander of others; envy at the excellencies others possess; anxiety to gain applause; distress and

* Buck.

† Baxter.

rage when slighted; and impatience of contradiction. This passion may be considered as the parent of discontent, covetousness, presumption, anger, extravagance, bigotry, war, and persecution.

What a picture of a proud man you have in HAMAN! "When Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath."* What a subject for profitable reflection is this man! How wonderful the ways of Providence! How foolish are those who seek the fleeting enjoyments of this world with such avidity, whose only portion is in this life! How slight our hold of creature-good!

"The spider's most attenuated thread
Is cord, is cable, to man's tender tie
On earthly bliss; it breaks at every breeze."†

Haman was prime minister to Ahasuerus, King of Persia,—sometimes called Artaxerxes Longimanus,—as well as his chief favourite. He was promoted above all the princes of the realm, and his seat was set above theirs. Supported by the favour and partiality of the king, who was a

* Esther iii. 5.

† Young.

great conqueror and the ruler of a vast empire, Haman thought himself one of the happiest of men. How was his mind expanded with hope, and inflated with prospects of greatness, glory, and felicity !

To gratify his pride, Haman required reverence, amounting to idolatrous homage, from all the king's servants. If it were only *civil* respect he demanded, Mordecai would have paid it, in obedience to the will of his royal master. Thus Haman's pride, as the wise man teaches, brought him to destruction ; his haughty spirit proved his fall.* Seeing that Mordecai refused him the accustomed reverence, his high spirit could not brook it, and he at once meditated revenge. He determined to ruin, not the offending individual alone, but all of his nation who were scattered through the provinces of the empire. But the triumph of the wicked is short. God takes the wise in his own craftiness, as you will see in the sequel.

Haman's pride was unseemly, because his honours were unmerited.—These honours were the gift of an undiscerning favouritism ; a fact that could not fail to excite disgust and discontent

* Prov. xvi. 18.

among the faithful servants of the king, especially in Mordecai, who had formerly saved him from assassination. The patient merit of the pious Jew found it hard to endure this proud man's contumely, especially when that proud man was so unworthy, having done his master no real service.

Better the lot of the industrious,—infinitely preferable the reward of honest labour, though scantily bestowed,—than the honours of royalty undeserved. An exalted station, through the mere favour of the great or wealthy, should rather be the object of dread than of desire. Persons thus distinguished seldom have real friends, and are sure to have many enemies. Besides, should they, even by inadvertence, displease their patron,—and you know the great are too often fickle,—how melancholy then the transition! Into what depths of degradation, contempt, and mental anguish are they, in that case, precipitated! You will readily recur to instances of this kind recorded in English history; instances which occurred when sovereigns were more absolute than in modern times. Let such recollections moderate your desires for gratuitous favours. Offices, distinctions, and large

gifts, of worldly sort, may promise happiness, but cannot give it.

Haman's pride rendered him unhappy beyond description.—Notwithstanding the esteem and preference of his royal master; the height of his official dignity; the special honour of being invited to Esther's banquet, and of sitting at the same table with the king and queen, with the prospect of similar honour next day; he was unutterably wretched because Mordecai refused to bow the knee, or prostrate himself before him! "All this," said the unhappy man, "availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Unsatisfying world! Could you, my young friends, inherit all that is in it, everything beauteous to behold, and gratifying to enjoy; every wish fulfilled, and every sense regaled to satiety; all would "avail nothing" to make you happy. Let the poet's axiom, in his address to God, therefore, be yours:

"Were I possessor of the earth,
And call'd the stars my own;
Without Thy graces, and Thyself,
I were a wretch undone!"

Haman's wounded pride originated a scheme of malignant and horrible revenge.—He "thought

scorn" to lay hands on Mordecai alone; but resolved on the massacre, "in one day," of all the Jews throughout the empire. To hide his motives and attain his object, he made plausible representations to the king, accompanied with abundance of calumnies concerning the people. Their laws, he said, were opposed to the king's laws; they were disloyal, consequently, and dangerous to the state. That there might be no objection on the ground of loss to the revenue, and the more certainly to compass his ends, he proffered to give ten thousand talents to the treasury,—amounting, according to some, to two millions one hundred and nineteen thousand pounds sterling. The king unsuspectingly gave his consent. Lots were cast, to fix upon a lucky month and day for the execution of this infernal design. The dread day was appointed; the decree drawn up, and sent with letters to all the provinces, requiring the government officers to destroy, kill, and cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, on the day named,—the property of the slain to be given to the slayers for reward! The variety, expensiveness, and cruelty of the means he employed to glut his revenge, may give you some idea of

the fury of his passion, the intensity of his desire to accomplish his vile purpose. See here the fruits of pride! It may be that you, my young friends, have sometimes secretly wished for place, power, and court-favour. In the merciful Providence of God, your wish has not been realized. Had you risen to offices of honour and emolument, *to the extent of your desire*, the most calamitous consequences might have followed. Such situations are fraught with danger. As, in the battle-field, the superior officer is a marked man, so the person thus elevated is exposed to peculiar temptations, from his own heart, from the flattery or envy, of those by whom he is surrounded, and from Satan, who, like a skilful angler, suits his baits to the station and circumstances, as well as to the dispositions, of individuals. Had you obtained your desire, pride, most likely, would have been engendered, an insolent or haughty carriage maintained, oppression practised; and, if such oppression were resented on the part of others, then revenge, with its fearful train of evils, might have followed. If, therefore, your covetous and vain desires have been disappointed, be thankful that you have thus escaped these snares and dangers.

Haman's pride, with the other passions to which it gave birth, accelerated his downfall.—When Mordecai perceived what was done, he put on sackcloth with ashes; cried with a loud and bitter cry; came even to the king's gate; revealed the cause of his distress to Esther; and requested her interference with Ahasuerus. Though at considerable risk, for the king was a despot, she complied. Three days and nights, at her desire, the Jews in the city fasted. This was a *religious fast*, accompanied, no doubt, by importunate prayer. If the *apocryphal* part of this book may be regarded as a credible *history* of these transactions, Mordecai and Esther, whose supplications are therein recorded, prayed with much pertinency and power. *A succession of most remarkable providences occurred, in consequence, which proved to a demonstration that the deliverance of Mordecai and his people was by DIVINE INTERPOSITION.* The occurrences to which I refer are these: Esther had not seen the king for thirty days,—a circumstance which softened his heart towards her, when she stood before him in the court. The usages of those times made it as dangerous for her to come into the royal presence uncalled, as for Vashti to refuse to come when called for.

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Instead of regarding her appearance as an immodest intrusion and an insult, (the king's heart was in the hand of the Lord at the moment!) he reached out to her in clemency the golden sceptre, which she touched: "What wilt thou, Queen Esther?" said the king, "and what is thy request? It shall be given thee, to the half of the kingdom!" Her request was moderate and simple; namely, that the king and Haman would come to the banquet she had prepared. They came. Here again the king renewed his inquiry and promise. She only desired that they would come to a similar banquet to-morrow. It was granted. Haman goes home, elated with his honours, giddy with joy; but filled with indignation that Mordecai would not bow. At his wife's instance, he causes a gallows fifty cubits high to be made, on which to have Mordecai hanged. The king, he had no doubt, would gratify him in this, he was in such high favour.

That night the king was unaccountably restless. You will readily conclude, *he could not sleep because Israel prayed.* He commanded the records of the kingdom to be brought and read before him, thus to beguile or profitably to employ those sleepless hours. Now see the hand

of God! "Amongst those voluminous registers of Acts and Monuments," says BISHOP HALL, "which so many scores of provinces must needs yield, the book shall open upon Mordecai's discovery of the late treason of the two eunuchs: the reader is turned thither by an insensible sway of Providence! Our most arbitrary or casual actions are overruled by a hand in heaven."* Having ascertained that nothing had been done to reward this act, no sooner had Haman arrived in the morning to solicit for Mordecai's execution, than the king inquired what should be done for the man whom he delighted to honour. Haman, thinking that the intended honour was for himself, after all the respect shown him the previous day, proposed that the man might be clothed in the royal apparel; set upon the king's horse; the crown placed on his head; that all this should be done by one of the king's most noble princes; and that, in this manner arrayed and attended, it should be proclaimed, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour." "Make haste," said Ahasuerus, "and do even so to—Mordecai the Jew that sitteth at the king's gate!" This

* Contemplations on Haman.

omened ill for Haman. When, at the second banquet, Esther made her petition to spare her life and that of her people, Haman was ordered to be hanged on the gibbet he had erected for Mordecai. Thus, in the snare which he laid was his own foot taken. So true is it his fall was occasioned and accelerated by pride. The same may be said of many beside: THOMAS A-BECKET, the haughty and rebellious priest whom Rome has canonized, and the lordly and ambitious CARDINAL WOLSEY, for example. How many memorable instances have we in Scripture of the power and prevalency of prayer! This is the way by which the true Israel have ever engaged God in their cause, and *against* their enemies and oppressors. If He be on our side, we need not fear what man can do unto us.

Consideration has been recommended as a remedy for pride: consideration of the *punishment* which this sin has brought upon mankind, as seen in the case of Pharaoh, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, and others; and consideration of *ourselves*,—"If we could trace our descent, we should find all slaves to come from princes, and all princes from slaves. To be proud of knowledge, is to be blind in the light; to be proud of

virtue, is to poison ourselves with the antidote; to be proud of authority, is to make our rise our downfall."*

A better remedy still would be a renewed heart.

* Seneca.

CHAPTER XIV.

Profanity.

“PROFANE (adj.) is from the same root as *fanatic*, and was properly applied to a person not to be admitted within the *fane* or *sanctuary*.”* This suggests that no person in his *right mind* would act profanely.

“To profane (v. a.) is to abuse or pollute holy things.”†

“Profanation is the act or habit of treating sacred things irreverently.”‡

The Sabbath is profaned when it is made a day of unhallowed pleasure. The Bible is profaned when its language is turned to purposes of jesting and buffoonery; and the house of God is profaned when professing worshippers conduct themselves there with levity or impropriety. The buyers and sellers in the temple profaned it when they

* Sullivan.

† Bailey.

‡ London Encyclopedia.

made it a "house of merchandise."* BELSHAZZAR profaned the vessels of the temple when he used them impiously at his idolatrous feast. This is our illustration: "They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."†

There is a striking coincidence between the narrative contained in this chapter of Holy Writ (Dan. v.) and the account given us of the taking of Babylon by ancient historians. DANIEL tells us that Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, besides his wives and concubines, and that he was slain the same night.‡ HERODOTUS and XENOPHON, the historians referred to, the former of whom was at Babylon, inform us that Cyrus, who allowed his uncle Darius to assume his own titles as long as he lived,

* John ii. 16. † Dan. v. 4—6. ‡ Verses 1, 2, 30.

knowing that a great annual festival was to be kept at Babylon on a day approaching, and that it was usual for the Babylonians on that occasion to spend the whole night in revelling, drunkenness, and all manner of disorders, and having now besieged the city two years, lighted on the following stratagem, which, with little difficulty, made him master of the place. He sent up a party of his men to the head of the canal, leading to the great lake,—the artificial lake made by Nebuchadnezzar for draining the river Euphrates,—with orders at a set time to break down the great bank or dam which was between the river and that canal, and to turn the whole current that way into the lake. In the interim, getting all his forces together, he posted one part of them at the place where the river ran into the city, and the other where it came out, with orders to enter the city that night by the channel of the river, as soon as they should find it fordable. And then, towards the evening, he opened the head of the trenches on both sides of the river above the city, to let the water of it run into them. And by this means, and the opening of the great dam, the river was so drained, that by the middle of the night, it being then in a

manner empty, both parties according to their orders entered the channel, the one having Gobrias and the other Gadates for their guides; and, finding the gates leading down to the river, which used on all other nights to be shut, then all left open through the neglect and disorder of that time of revelling and wantonness, both parties, ascending through them into the city, met at the palace, as had been concerted between them, surprised and slew the guards, and, rushing in, took the palace, where the king, fighting sword in hand, was slain.*

The exciting causes of Belshazzar's profanity first claim your consideration.—One of these was the company he kept. Could you expect him to act otherwise, surrounded by his idolatrous lords, wives, and concubines, the companions of his guilt? No other mode of entertainment would have pleased his voluptuous guests than one affording full scope to their desire for frantic mirth, the usual attendant upon revelling, drunkenness, and impiety. Had he associated with Daniel, and the other pious Jews, in preference, *they* would have checked, rather than

* Prideaux: *Connexion between the Old and New Testaments*, pp. 170, 171.

encouraged, such follies. See here the corrupting and stimulating influence of bad company! To be found, *of choice*, in the society of the gay, the giddy, the lewd, the profane, to join in their festivities when “the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts,”* is the sure way to render further compliances necessary; for otherwise they will “think it strange”—perhaps banter, upbraid, or speak evil of you—if “ye run not with them to the same excess of riot.”† If your disposition be social, and you cannot enjoy life without society, be wise and firm enough to make a safe selection. For this purpose discriminate before you choose; and if, upon examination, you find those with whom you would associate loose in their principles, idle in their habits, and impure in their morals, I warn you, by the value you set upon your character, your peace, your eternal salvation, and even your worldly prosperity, to shun them as you would the mouth of the pit. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.”‡

An intemperate use of wine was another exciting cause of Belshazzar’s profanity.—“Whiles he tasted

* Isaiah v. 12. † 1 Peter iv. 4. ‡ Prov. xiii. 20.

the wine," not as yet perhaps to excess, he "commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. . . . They DRANK WINE;" and then, under its intoxicating influence, did that which men in their sober senses would have been ashamed to do; for they "praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."* What a scene must that impious feast have displayed! How irrational, noisy, extravagant the king and his guests,—no better than so many madmen! Such were the effects of the copious draughts of wine of which they "drank." What a revolting picture is that of the drunkard, as you have seen already in the chapter on intemperance! It is too little, it is incorrect, merely to say that by his excess he has *embruted* himself. It is much worse than that. The beast but slakes his thirst, *he* creates a thirst unquenchable! Both are irrational; but *he* has made himself so! The beast walks with firm step; *he* cannot keep his feet steadily, if at all. His sin cannot be hid. His understanding blinded,

* Dan. v. 2, 4.

his reason fled, his passions inflamed, no marvel if he play the fool, the blasphemer, the maniac! And then who can contemplate his end without horror? Few confirmed drunkards are ever permanently reclaimed; such is the enslaving power of the desire for strong drink. This is admonitory. When Belshazzar and his guests "tasted" the wine, finding it of inviting quality, they "drank" freely. Some cannot taste wine or spirituous liquor without drinking to excess. Such persons, at least, should be *total* abstainers. When tasting brings them under the power of it, they ought to keep themselves entirely out of its power. "I will not," says Paul, "be brought under the POWER of anything," even though it should be in itself "lawful."*

The manifestations of Belshazzar's profanity next demand your attention.—The praise lavished upon their gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone, was one of these manifestations. The Psalmist says that those who "make" idols, and by parity of reason those who *praise* them, are "like unto them,"†—senseless and stupid. This will remind you of the usual concomitant of a godless feast. The persons present invariably talk of

* See 1 Cor. vi. 12. † Ps. cxv. 8.

their *idols*,—the objects and pursuits which usurp the throne of God in their affections. Horses, dogs, guns, politics, the play, the ball, or other favourite pleasures, are the subjects of high and glowing eulogy, according to the degree of their enthusiasm, or the strength of their predilections. Too generally the conversation is puerile and unprofitable. No wonder that Lord BYRON, though polluted in imagination and sensual in heart, found no food for his lofty intellect, ordinarily, in scenes of this description. Returning home once from such a place, he makes this sarcastic but graphic record in his diary: "They talked without ideas."* Persons of sensual and grovelling minds are unlikely to profit you by intercourse with them. If you would promote your mental improvement and gratification socially, mingle with the intelligent; and if you value your spiritual profit and enjoyment, seek the company of those who closely and habitually walk with God.

The most daring exhibition of Belshazzar's profanity was the insult offered to Jehovah by the impious use made of the vessels of the temple. I call this an insult to Jehovah; for those who despise His house and worship affront Himself.

* Memoir.

Young people, remember this, when tempted to levity or irreverence in the sanctuary of the Lord! What is done to the persons or things which belong to God, He takes as done to Himself. If His beloved Son be slighted,—if Divine honours be refused Him,—the Most High is offended; for, says our Lord, “He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him.”* Let the Deist or Socinian think of this!—If the *name* of God be blasphemed, or used with irreverent lightness, He will not hold the transgressor guiltless. It is related of HOWARD, that standing one day near the door of a printing-office, he heard some dreadful volleys of oaths and curses from a public-house opposite, and, buttoning his pocket up before he went into the street, he said to the workmen near him, “I always do this whenever I hear men swear; as I think that any one who can take God’s name in vain can also steal, or do anything else that is bad.”†—To profane the *Sabbath* is to provoke the Lord of the Sabbath to vindicate the claims of His holy day. Examples of the Divine displeasure against Sabbath-breakers are of common occurrence; but, alas! they seldom produce their due impres-

* John v. 23.

† Cheever’s Cyclopaedia.

sion. If "blessed is the man who keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it," he who desecrates the sacred day is sure to inherit a curse, and not a blessing.

Belshazzar's profanity was followed by the most awful and disastrous consequences.—How vivid the prophet's narrative! His simplicity and sublimity in the relation are inimitable: "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." "He *affronts* God, and God *affrights* him.* "Here is a very natural description of fear and terror: The face grows pale; the mind becomes greatly agitated; pains seize on the lower part of the back and kidneys; an universal tremor takes place, so that the knees smite one against another; and, lastly, a fainting-fit takes place, or the cry of distress is uttered, ver. 7: 'The king cried.'† As in this case, the punishment of profanity is sometimes immediate and signal. Take the fol-

* Henry *in loco*.

† Dr. A. Clarke.

lowing example :—"Between eleven and twelve o'clock in the forenoon of August 4th, 1796, a violent storm of thunder and lightning arose in the district of Montpellier. In a field about a mile from the town, a body of nine hundred French soldiers lay encamped. At a small distance from the camp, five of the soldiers were assisting a husbandman in gathering in the produce of the earth. When the storm came on, the whole party took refuge under a tree, where the five soldiers began to blaspheme God for interrupting them in their labour ; and one of them, in the madness of his presumption, took up his firelock, which he happened to have by him, and, pointing it towards the skies, said he would fire a bullet at Him who sent the storm ! Seized with horror at his blasphemous declaration, the husbandman made all the haste he could to quit their company ; but scarcely had he got the distance of ten paces from the tree, when a flash of lightning struck four of the soldiers dead, and wounded the fifth in such a manner that his life was despaired of."*

With all their boasted philosophy, death is the king of terrors to infidels and sceptics. Facts

* Wilson's Facts and Incidents.

recorded of VOLNEY, THOMAS PAINE, VOLTAIRE, and others might be given in proof; but I forbear.

"In that night," the night of Belshazzar's guilty revels, his doom was recorded by the mysterious hand-writing on the wall: "in that night" he was weighed in the balances, and found wanting: "in that night" the kingdom departed from him: "in that night," in the midst of his bacchanalian debauch, "was Belshazzar, the King of the Chaldeans, slain."

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

* Heb. x. 31.

CHAPTER XV.

Love of Money.

It would be impossible, perhaps, to select an example of the evil and danger of this base passion so instructively impressive as that of JUDAS ISCARIOT. Behold the picture of this money-lover, as drawn by the pencil of inspiration : "Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."* "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver."† "And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray Him

* John xii. 4—6.

† Matt. xxvi. 14, 15.

unto them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money.”* “Then entered Satan into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money.”†

St. Paul affirms that “the love of money is the root of all evil.”‡ The history of Judas at once proves and illustrates the correctness and force of this maxim. But some do not see how the assertion can be sustained. Let us then explain the apostle’s meaning. As he had been speaking of *riches* in the preceding verse, by “money” he manifestly means the same thing; and therefore we are not to restrict it merely to silver and gold, but extend it to include all kinds of riches,—houses, lands, cattle; every description of wares and goods, as well as the metal or coin which we call money.

The love of money, as mentioned in the passage quoted, is an *inordinate* esteem for it, complacency in it, and desire to obtain it. That such love is the root of all evil will appear, if you con-

* Mark xiv. 10, 11. † Luke xxii. 3—5. ‡ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

sider that in the pursuit of it men neglect their duties to God,—prayer in the closet, in the family, and in public; the reading and study of the Scriptures, as well as Gospel ordinances. The love of money leads multitudes openly to violate the Divine law. They profane the Sabbath by making it a day of business, or, more generally, a day of recreation; because their desire of gain will not allow them sufficient time for relaxation on the week-day. The same desire makes the world the theme of their meditation, whilst outwardly engaged in the service of the sanctuary. It not only violates the precepts of the *first*, but of the *second* table. The lover of money, as will hereafter appear, worketh all manner of ill to his neighbour. No wonder, therefore, that the apostle should call it the root of all evil. Ancient philosophers have a sentiment remarkably similar. *Bion* was wont to say, the love of money was “the metropolis of wickedness.” And *Apollodorus* says, “When thou speakest of the love of money, thou mentionest the head of all evils; for they are all contained in that.” To the same purpose is the saying of *Phocylides* the poet: “The love of riches is the mother of all wickedness.”*

* Bishop Beveridge's Private Thoughts on Worldly Riches.

The first fruit of the love of money in Judas, which I shall notice, is his hypocrisy.—A hypocrite, you know, is one under a mask; one who appears to be what he is not. Judas pretended to a considerable degree of affection for the little household, so to speak, of which he was a member. During their journeys, Jesus and His disciples were a kind of family, having one common stock, chiefly supplied, perhaps, by the bounty of others. Of these supplies, Judas was the steward, or provider. He had the bag, and bare what was put therein, as if he would thus evince a kind and generous readiness to minister to their necessities, though it were a burdensome and anxious office! He pretended a strict regard for economy, and warmly expressed his dissatisfaction that such waste was made of the ointment with which Mary anointed the Saviour. He also assumed great pity for the suffering poor, thus wronged! In this respect, the image and superscription of Judas is distinctly traceable on all lovers of money. When solicited for aid towards benevolent objects, they abound in feigned objections and excuses. They regret they cannot do so consistently; the prior claims of their own household, or particular church, or of the poor,

stand in the way ; or it would be an improper waste, not at all required by the necessities of the case. All the while, without the “discerning of spirits,” you can see the selfishness of the money-lover under these feigned words.

Another fruit of this “meanest of vices” in Judas was his dishonesty.—“He was a thief, and had the bag.” There could not be much for him to covet ; but he took care to gratify the vile propensity by securing something for himself. Whether he sought and obtained the office with this intent we are not informed. Here, also, Judas is the representative of many. The baneful influence exerted by the supreme love of money on principle, motive, and action, is so well expressed by a French author, that I cannot more fully exhibit the fault under consideration than by transcribing the searching interrogatories with which he urges the duty of self-examination :—

“Are the MEANS you employ to obtain money always pure ? Be not offended at the question. I speak not of the means that lead to the galleys or the prison. But though you may escape the law, are your efforts to secure money always lawful in the estimation of men, and especially before God ? Is there no one among you that lends

money at a rate of interest which the law of your country, as well as that of charity, forbids? Are there not in your transactions secrets which you would blush to see exposed? Is fraud altogether unknown in your affairs? Are there no light weights, no short measures, no unfair samples, no erroneous returns of income,—is there nothing false? Is lying banished from your dealing? Have you never promised what you could not perform? nor deceived a purchaser with regard to the quality or value of your merchandise, or the place from which it has been imported? Do you never ask for goods an exorbitant price, and such as the laws of trade do not warrant? Do you never take advantage of the position or ignorance of your customers, to impose upon them burdensome conditions, and such as you would not yourself accept? Has the love of gain never induced you to retain some office, or accept some commission, repugnant to your conscience? Have you never reaped advantage from the injustice of others? nor refused to others the restitution they had a right to expect, though they had not the power to compel it? Have you never exacted with severity and cruelty what was due to you? Finally: if you are entire strangers to all these

bad practices, are there none to which you would have had recourse but for the restraints of law or the checks of public opinion? Search, prove yourselves. I pretend not to judge you. I only wish to assist you to judge yourselves before your consciences and before your God." *

To the love of money in Judas you must also trace his uncharitableness.—In reality he cared not for the poor. The same may be said of all "covetous" people, "whom the Lord abhors."† If they respond to appeals in private or public for charitable purposes, could you scan their motives, you would find that they do so not so much from compassion towards the objects to be relieved, as from the hope of *gain* to a much larger amount, perhaps, than their present *loss*. Their donations or subscriptions therefore do not express care for the poor so much as for themselves! The same persons, strangers to every generous and ennobling emotion, finding it no good speculation in other circumstances to *give*, would stand unmoved by the cry of the forlorn widow, the bereaved orphan, or the perishing heathen!

Judas's love of money prompted those acts of base-

* The Money-lover: A sermon by the Rev. Adolphe Monod.

† Ps. x. 3.

ness towards his Master which render his memory hateful to all generations.—It was this which roused his displeasure when Mary expended her “very costly” pound of ointment on the Saviour, —not too costly, she felt, to bestow on Him who enabled her to choose the “good part,” and raised her brother from the dead,—thus embalming His body beforehand against the day of His burying, which she knew was fast approaching. This becoming expression of her gratitude the sordid Judas censures as an act of prodigality! The climax of his cupidity was the treacherous betrayal of his Master. If he entertained a hope of rising to some position of honour and *emolument* in the temporal kingdom which the disciples expected their Lord to establish, that hope he now saw must necessarily be disappointed, having heard Him recently refer once and again to His death as soon to take place. Urged on by the avarice of his heart, he went to the Jewish rulers, and covenanted with them for thirty pieces of silver, although, no doubt, he would fain have obtained more. Let it be remembered that they promised him money; * “of which the thirty pieces of silver might have been the mere earnest.”† On this

* Mark xiv. 11.

† Kitto.

transaction RICHARD WATSON observes: "Everything here is in keeping with the character of Judas. Avarice was his leading passion; and he is anxious to make a good and secure bargain before he ventures upon his villany: 'What will ye give me?' And, however strange and inexplicable his conduct may at first sight appear, the fact of his being under the dominion of this absorbing passion will sufficiently account for it." * Alas, foul as that conduct was, he has his imitators to this day. Many there are who, actuated by the same despicable passion, consider all contribution to uphold the honour and extend the kingdom of Christ as mere "waste!" While some have been found to deliver up His church and cause for money! Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is THUS betrayed!

Judas's love of money ended in self-murder.—Without entering into the controversy upon the *mode*, it is undeniable that he committed the *act* upon himself. Having obtained the cursed pelf, as one observes, the infatuating prize being in possession, the passion had subsided; and, stung with remorse, he went and executed upon himself that last act which was to seal his eternal destiny.

* Exposition of Matt. xxvi. 15.

To remedy this evil—the inordinate love of money—ponder deeply our Lord's warning, to which your attention has been already called,—“Take heed, and beware of covetousness;” be mindful of your duty to give to God a due proportion of your income; but, above all, let the sordid affection be expelled from your heart by the constraining love of Christ!

CHAPTER XVI.

Malevolence.

Anger, usually, is an impulsive or sudden emotion, and often transient. Malevolence, "*malevolentia*, (Latin,) ill-will, an inclination to hurt others,"* is a deliberate and fixed feeling: it may be the fruit of anger, but is generally associated with hurtful *plans* or *designs*.

Cain supplied us with an illustration of anger. HEROD AGRIPPA may be selected as an example of malevolence, whose conduct towards the Christians the inspired historian thus describes: "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and de-

* London Encyclopædia.

livered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him ; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison : but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." *

HEROD AGRIPPA was grandson of HEROD THE GREAT, who thought to kill the Infant Redeemer by murdering "all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under ;"† so that the cruel instincts of the grandfather were inherited by the grandson.

Herod's persecution of the Christians, as above described, was gradual.—About that time he stretched forth his hands, or *began* to stretch forth, as in the margin, to vex certain of the church.‡ He did not go to extremities all at once, either as to the mode or extent of his persecution. At first he began to vex only "certain" of the church. He vexed them, we may suppose, either by threats, fines, imprisonment, or by the confiscation of their goods. Not content with these milder measures, he seized JAMES, the brother of JOHN, and had him beheaded. This was James the *greater*, one of the two apostles called Boanerges, sons of

* Acts xii. 1—5. † Matt. ii. 16. ‡ Acts xii. 1.

thunder, because of the fervour of their zeal and great ability as preachers. No doubt Herod thought that, having rid the country of such an eminent minister, he had given a great blow to Christianity. Because he saw this pleased the malignant Jews, who hated Christ and His religion, and wishing to make himself popular with them, "he proceeded further to take Peter also." This act is quite in keeping with the character given of him by JOSEPHUS: "This king was liberal in his gifts, and *very ambitious to please the people* by large donations; and he made himself very illustrious by the many expensive presents he made them. He took delight in giving, and rejoiced in living with *good reputation*."* He held his appointment under the Roman emperor. This foreign rule was always unpopular among the Jews. In order, therefore, to secure a peaceful reign, and to prevent insurrection and tumult, it was necessary for him to court their favour, to indulge their wishes, and to fall in with their prejudices.

Persecution is said to be "threefold: mental, verbal, and actual or open."† Mental persecu-

* Antiquities, b. xix., ch. viii., sec. iii.

† Buck.

tion is another word for the persecuting principle or disposition. Where that principle exists, there wants but the occasion or favouring circumstances to develop it in all its frightful details. Let the persecutor consider this. When Herod *began* to vex the church, he did not, perhaps, contemplate going so far as to murder JAMES and PETER, its chief ministers ; but, having commenced his *vexatious* work, his motives and objects, as well as his nature, impelled him to proceed. The persecuting spirit, like the tiger's thirst for blood, increases by indulgence. The career, begun mentally, may end in murder. Those, therefore, who feel, at times, the disposition stirring within them, should give all diligence to conquer it ; else it may propel them to deeds of violence and cruelty, from the idea of which they now shrink with horror.

One of the canons of the Council of Trent teaches that all persons baptized may be compelled by bitter punishment to be Christians, or, what is the same in Roman Catholic divinity, spiritual subjects of the Pope. In the eighth and fourteenth canons compulsion by punishment is enjoined, in order to subjugate all baptized persons to his dominion. What a striking

commentary on these canons have we in the persecuting schemes and measures of the Church of Rome for converting nations and individuals to her faith! Witness her anathemas, excommunications, and the tortures and fires of the Inquisition! Nothing but her want of power, and the ascendancy of Protestantism, compel that Church to hold her obnoxious doctrines in abeyance.* Further light is shed upon the bitter spirit of persecution by the plot for the slaughter of the French Protestants in 1572, by order of the infamous CATHERINE DE MEDICIS and her son CHARLES IX. This plot, hypocritically preceded by a solemn oath of safety to its chief victims, ushered in by banquets and plays, followed by words and deeds of treachery, was consummated by the ST. BARTHOLOMEW MASSACRE, which continued for seven days; during which, according to a Popish historian, one hundred thousand Huguenots were ferociously butchered. The news was received at Rome with unrestrained joy and delight; and a medal was struck at the Pope's mint, which is yet extant, with his own head (GREGORY XIII.) on the one side, and

* See Elliott's *Delineation of Romanism*, p. 120.

a rude representation of the massacre on the other.*

Herod's persecution, in the case of Peter, sustained a triumphant defeat in answer to prayer.— Having apprehended the apostle, he put him in prison, under the care of sixteen soldiers, and chained to one, “intending,” after the passover, when he might secure the greater popularity, “to bring him forth to the people,”—that is, to have him publicly executed.~ This was the time for the church to have recourse to those *arms* with which she ever wages successful war against her enemies: “Prayers and tears are the weapons with which the saints have obtained the most glorious victories.”† Accordingly, prayer was made without ceasing of the church to God for Peter. Prayer made by such Christians, with such faith and fervour, could not be unavailing. The sequel affords another proof of the truly wondrous power of prayer. As a means, it brought the angel down from heaven; knocked off the chains from Peter's hands; opened the first and second wards of the prison; and even

* Rule's *Martyrs of the Reformation*; and Farrar's *Ecclesiastical Dictionary*.

† Henry on *Hosea* xii. 4.

the great iron gate leading into the city: in a word, prayer instrumentally delivered this persecuted servant of Christ out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. My young friends! let this encourage you to bring the case of those persecuted for righteousness' sake to the throne of grace, whether found in heathen or Papal countries. Sympathize especially with Missionaries of the Cross thus tried. Shall their importunity be in vain when they imploringly cry from their several spheres of toil and suffering, "Brethren, pray for us?" O, no! the pious youth whom I address will surely plead with God that, despite of the malignant spirit, plans, and efforts of persecution, His word, as preached by His servants, "may have free course, and be glorified!"

Herod's persecution of the church was judicially punished by an awful death.—On a set day, arrayed in royal apparel, he sat upon his throne, and made an oration to his flatterers and admirers, when they gave a shout of idolatrous applause, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man!" "Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the

ghost."* The "angel of the Lord smote him" in the hour of his triumph; thus making him an example to similar offenders in all generations. Is it dangerous to insult a sovereign upon his throne? To persecute Christ, in the meanest of His members, is not less so. We see that even nations do not escape punishment, where the crime of persecution is committed or sanctioned by the ruling power. Inquisitorial Spain is to this day spiritually benighted, depressed, distracted, wretched! As to individuals, sacred history abounds in solemn facts, proving that God is the avenger of His people, even in the present world. I need only remind you of the examples of Pharaoh, Ahab, Jezebel, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod Agrippa. Numerous instances to the same effect are to be found in secular and ecclesiastical history, as we saw in Chapter II. To these we may add two or three others. VALERIAN, a malevolent persecutor, was taken prisoner by SATOR, King of Persia; carried in triumph to his capital, treated with all manner of indignity, and at last flayed alive by order of that monarch, who had salt thrown over his mangled body, so that he died in the greatest torments. His skin was tanned, and painted red;

* Acts xii. 21—23.

and, that the ignominy might be lasting, it was nailed up in one of the temples of Persia.* The inhuman NERO, by whom the Christians were treated with indescribable barbarity,—who set fire to Rome in several places, accusing *them* of the act, and then having many of them torn by dogs, or burned during the night in the gardens of his palace,†—became at last intolerable to the empire. The Senate condemned the tyrant to be dragged naked through the streets of Rome, whipped to death, and afterwards to be thrown down from the Tarpeian rock, like the meanest malefactor. This, however, Nero prevented by killing himself.‡

Papal Rome has scarcely been less virulent and unrelenting in her persecutions than Pagan Rome. Witness the efforts to *exterminate* the Albigenses and Waldenses; as, also, the Irish Protestants in 1641 and 1798. The massacre of 1641 met a stern retribution soon after at the hands of CROMWELL, who “in a few months subjugated Ireland, as Ireland had never been subjugated during the five centuries of slaughter which had elapsed since

* Lempriere's Classical Dictionary.

† Beeton's Dictionary of Universal Information.

‡ London Encyclopædia.

the landing of the first Norman settlers.”* To give you examples of signal judgments against Papal persecutors would require a volume. I select the following remarkable history:—

“During the persecution of the Protestants by the Roman Catholics in the seventeenth century, some children were playing on the banks of the Suir, near Golden, in the county of Tipperary, when a man came up to them, knowing them to be born of Protestant parents, and with a pike threw most of them into the river, where they were instantly drowned. One of the children, however, a girl about eleven years of age, ran off, and escaped to Clonmel, thirteen miles distant. At Waterford, a ship lay bound to America, taking in servants and passengers. An agent of the captain was at Clonmel, who, finding the child unprovided for, took her as an indentured servant. The captain sold her time to a planter, a single young man. The rectitude of her conduct, her amiable disposition, and comeliness of person, so attracted her master’s affections, that, after her time was expired, he proposed to marry her; which proposal she, at length, acceded to, and they lived together in much happiness for several

* Macaulay.

years, during which she brought him six children. She then declined in health and spirits; a deep melancholy overspread her mind, so as greatly to distress her husband. He observed her, particularly when she thought him asleep, to sigh deeply, as if something very weighty lay on her spirits. After much entreaty, she related to him what she saw when she was a girl in Ireland; and said that scarce a day or night had passed for the last twelve months but she had felt a pressure on her mind, and had, as it were, heard distinctly a voice saying, 'Thou must go to Ireland, and bring the murderer of the children to justice.' Thus she was tossed to and fro in her mind, uncertain how to determine; and her agitation was such that it was apprehended her dissolution was near at hand. Her husband strongly urged her to go, believing it was so required of God; and, as the Governor's brother was Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland then, he thought it a suitable time. He waited upon the Governor, who obliged him with letters of recommendation to his brother, and such other gentlemen as would enable her to bring this man to justice, whose name she did not know, but whose person was indelibly stamped on her memory. In a few weeks she recovered her

former health and spirits, and embarked, with suitable attendants, on board a vessel for Dublin.

“On her arrival, she waited on the viceroy at the Castle, and delivered her letters. He entered warmly into the matter, as worthy of public concern ; yet he thought great secrecy and prudence requisite to effect the desired purpose. The viceroy, as a wise man, sent for the judges, just then appointed for the Munster circuit, showed them the letters she had brought from his brother, and requested they would interest themselves in this business. The judges treated her with great respect, and assured her of their vigorous assistance to bring the murderer to justice ; but, as she did not know the man’s name, nor where he now dwelt, if living, they saw much difficulty in the matter. However, she was desired not to communicate with anyone but the viceroy and themselves ; and, as the assizes for the county of Tipperary were very numerously attended, they would take care she should be placed in such a convenient part of the court-house, every day, at Clonmel, that, if there, she could not but have an opportunity of seeing him. The day after her arrival there, and during the first sitting, she was placed, by the direction of the judges to the

sheriff, in a commodious place for her purpose. With anxious solicitude she watched for the person. At length a jury was returned to try a cause. On their names being called over to be sworn, she saw a man come forward, whom she instantly knew to be the person she came to prosecute, and then heard his name called. At a suitable time she informed the judges that the man was in court, and gave them his name. The judges instantly adjourned the court, and sent the sheriff to the juryman to meet them immediately at their lodgings, where they soon arrived. On sitting down, one of the judges said, 'Madam, be pleased to relate to this gentleman what you related to us and the Lord-Lieutenant, last week, at Dublin Castle.' The lady, looking the juryman full in the face, said, 'My lords, when I was a girl, I saw that man now before you throw seven children into the river Suir,'—and proceeded with the particulars. Whilst she was speaking he grew pale, and trembled exceedingly ; but when she came to that part of her relation respecting a pressure of mind for more than a year, which she believed to be from God, he was quite overcome, confessed his guilt, and the truth of all she asserted. On this, the grand jury were sent for, and

bills of indictment found against him. Next day he was tried, found guilty, and subsequently executed in Clonmel. This man had read his recantation from the Church of Rome, professed himself a Protestant, and thus became qualified to be a juror.*

Herod's persecution was overruled for the spread of the Gospel and of Christianity.—Immediately after narrating the judicial death of Herod, (the angel of the Lord being made the executioner,) the inspired historian adds, "But the word of God grew and multiplied."† It was so after Saul's persecution: "the churches were multiplied."‡ And after the persecution that arose about Stephen: "a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."§ While the natural man will ascribe to diplomacy, war, or other secondary causes, the remarkable changes which have recently taken place in ITALY, "ye which are spiritual" will rather exclaim, "What hath God wrought" in answer to *unceasing prayer* made by His church! You will remember that the cruelties practised towards the MADIAR by the Grand-Duke of Tuscany, and the oppression of POERIO and his compatriots by the King of Naples, stirred

* Irish Methodist Magazine for 1805.

† Acts xii. 24. ‡ Acts ix. 31. § Acts xi. 21.

the sympathies and drew forth the intercessions of devout Christians everywhere. It is therefore no less instructive on the subject of united prayer than refreshing, that these and like tyrannies have been overthrown, and religious toleration established, under the sceptre of VICTOR EMMANUEL. Let us hope that there, in SPAIN, and every other land, once the scene of persecution, the word of the Lord may "mightily grow and prevail," as it did at Ephesus after the malevolent efforts of the "vagabond Jews" to check its progress.* Meanwhile "let us draw near" to the throne of grace "in full assurance of faith" that the Gospel will ultimately triumph; and let us cherish the confidence of the Psalmist regarding its opposers: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure."†

* Acts xix.

† Ps. ii. 1—5.

CHAPTER XVII.

Procrastination.

You need scarcely be told that to procrastinate—from “*pro*, for or after, and *crastinò*, to-morrow”—is “to defer from day to day, to linger;”* “to delay, be dilatory.”† You have an illustration in FELIX, before whom Paul made his defence, as recorded in Acts xxiv. St. Luke relates that “as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”‡ Felix, you know, means “happy, prosperous, fortunate.”§ Did he realize the meaning of his name? Alas! no. But why? Perhaps, he received this name because, having once been a slave, he obtained his freedom from the Emperor Claudius Cæsar, and was

* Entick.

† London Encyclopædia.

‡ Verse 25.

§ Entick.

made the Governor of Judea.* Yet was he not happy, because happiness is not to be found in

“Wealth, honour, pleasure, or what else”

this unsatisfying world can give. And he could not be happy, because he was, according to the testimony of history, an immoral man. The character which the ancients have left of him is of a very dark complexion. They tell us that he was *licentious*; that during his governorship in Judea he indulged in all kinds of cruelty and lust; that he considered himself licensed to commit any crime, relying on the influence he possessed at court. They inform us that he employed a magician to persuade DRUSILLA by his arts to forsake her husband and marry him; she consented, for she was seated with him, being called his wife, when Paul reasoned before him.† He was *rapacious*. He expected a bribe from the apostle for his liberty; in order to procure which, he seems to have had several interviews with him: “He hoped that money should be given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and

* Suetonius and Tacitus.

† See Kitto's Cyclopædia of Religious Literature.

communed with him.”* The depravity which such hope implies is in strict agreement with his general character as drawn by historians. “Nero recalled him on account of his rapacity.”† True, it is related by Josephus‡ that he rendered some services to Judea by suppressing a formidable band of robbers by whom the country had been long infested; that he quelled a great sedition which arose in Cesarea; and that he slew an Egyptian impostor who said he was a prophet, with four hundred of his followers.§ But what morally good act did he ever do? Perhaps you say, Did he not shelter St. Paul from his persecutors? Did he not show the apostle kindness in the prison by allowing his friends to visit him? Did he not evince great condescension, and an ardent desire to be made acquainted with Christianity, by hearing him preach? *Bad motives* are the dead flies in the ointment.|| The prospect of a considerable sum, as a ransom, from the apostle or his friends, accounts for it all. Many specious deeds, regarded and depended on as good works, will be found to be but gilded

* Acts xxiv. 26.

† Beeton's Dictionary.

‡ Antiquities of the Jews, book 20.

§ See Acts xxi. 38.

|| Eccles. x. 1.

wickedness, if traced to the motive. Do you say, "He *trembled* under Paul's reasoning and appeals to his conscience; and was not that something to commend?" Well, but mark the issue. Did his apprehensions terminate in the inquiry of the humbled Saul of Tarsus, who, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" or in that of the anxious jailer at Philippi, who sprang in, and came trembling, and, falling down before Paul and Silas, cried, "What must I do to be saved?" No such thing: they ended in the dismissal of his convictions, as well as of the preacher: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." It does not appear that he ever sent for him after, with any desire to benefit by his instructions. He could not be *happy*, therefore, because, in matters of religion, he was a PROCRASTINATOR. He delayed to renounce those evils, the guilt and danger of which, under the apostle's reasoning, filled his soul, for the moment, with terror and alarm; and to embrace that "faith in Christ" which he had sent for Paul to explain.

"Felix trembled," and thus pleaded guilty to the two grand counts in the indictment, implied in the address of Paul; namely, injustice and

intemperance. He had reason to fear and tremble; but we cannot let the noble conduct of the apostle pass without an observation. Felix sent for him to entertain himself and Drusilla with a doctrinal account of Christianity. Their amusement, or at most their information, seems to be all that Felix had in view in requiring Paul to appear before them. Here was strong temptation to soften down the truth of God, and pander to the corrupt tastes and wishes of his licentious hearers. But does the apostle gratify their desire? Does he content himself with expounding his opinions, showing the superiority of Christianity as a system, and of himself as its advocate, politely leaving the vices of his voluptuous hearers unnoticed and undisturbed? O, no! He had not so learned Christ! His great soul, as the faithful minister of God, was above the meanness of such expediency. His simplicity of aim and true love for souls are conspicuous. Instead of pleasing men to their injury, he would risk their displeasure in order to their salvation. In this respect how unlike those who, in their preaching, aim at anything below the conversion of the hearers! In such sermons you may find a display of learning, of imagination,

of logic, of metaphysics, of theological acquirements, or of controversial tact, but little, if any, saving truth: Under such a ministry, no Lydia opens her heart to attend to the things spoken; no Mary chooses the good part; no trembling penitent asks, "What must I do to be saved?"

Paul reasoned of "righteousness," or justice. This was the effectual way to preach to an unjust judge, who had unlawfully taken Drusilla from her husband, and was now living with her as his wife. She was equally worthy of blame; perhaps more so, as a Jewess. Felix was likewise intemperate, not having the proper government of himself. What is the proper meaning of "temperance" here? It does not signify moderation merely, in one particular, but complete mastery over all the passions. With what wisdom did the apostle reason! Had he directly exposed injustice and intemperance, Felix and Drusilla would have felt personally insulted by an attack upon their vices; and, their prejudices and resentment once roused, there could be little hope of doing them good: but, descanting on the opposite virtues, he reached their consciences without giving them offence. Although Felix trembled at the appre-

hension of the "judgment to come," and at its consequences, he deferred the practical consideration of the subjects brought before him to a future day. Unhappy Felix! That day, it is to be feared, never came. He soon returned to his old sins; and added this to all his other acts of injustice and oppression, that he left Paul, his faithful monitor, bound in prison, to please the Jews; hoping thus to prevent the complaints which he knew they intended to make to the Emperor against his government. This unprincipled expediency failed. They preferred their accusations, as Josephus relates, and he was degraded.

To have vivid and affecting views of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," views issuing in speedy and fruitful repentance, concerns you, my dear young friends, as much as Felix. Let me now address myself specially to those of you who have remained impenitent to this hour. Righteousness or justice requires what is just and right between man and God; that you render to Him His due. Now you admit that God has indisputable claims upon you as His own. You acknowledge that you are His by creating, providential, and redeeming right; His by the most solemn and endearing ties. But have

you yielded to Him the supreme affection of your hearts, and the cheerful obedience of your lives? Have you given your whole selves to Him, keeping back no part, so that there is no occasion for the charge brought against ancient Israel, "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty?"* Justice demands that you render to all your fellow-men their due. Have you then been just and true in all your dealings? deceiving none? over-reaching none? doing to others as you would, in like circumstances, they should do unto you? Temperance, we have seen, means self-government. Have you had all your members under proper control, never allowing the inferior part of your nature to bring into subjection the superior? Have your senses been, not the despotic rulers, but the willing and obedient servants, of your souls? Weighed in these balances, if you are found wanting, revert in your thoughts to the judgment to come. Let your minds be duly impressed with its solemnity. Remember that "the unrighteous"—the impenitent, the unbelieving, the unforgiven, the unrenewed—"shall not inherit the kingdom of God."† If summoned by the voice of the archangel and

* Hosea x. 2.

† 1 Cor. vi. 9.

the trump of God to the bar of judgment as you *now* are, where should you appear?—on the right or left hand of the Judge? You may well tremble at the question, and at the prospect! As sure as the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, the sentence of dismissal into everlasting fire will be pronounced on *you*, except you repent and be converted.* Perhaps you say, “I do intend to repent and be converted, but not now.” Or, if you do not actually *say* that, perhaps you *think* it. Well, it is all the same. He who postpones his repentance till to-morrow, as one observes, “has one day more to repent of, and one day less to repent in.”† But it may be, you imagine that it will be time enough to repent on your death-bed. Dangerous infatuation! It is well described by the poet :

“Procrastination is the thief of time ;
Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
And to the mercies of a moment leaves
The vast concerns of an eternal scene.”‡

How admonitory that there is but *one* instance of effectual repentance in the hour of death recorded in Scripture! But ponder, I beseech you, the

* Luke xiii. 3; Acts iii. 19. † Mason's Remains.

‡ Young.

import of this speech, "I will not repent and turn to God till a more convenient season." In speaking thus, you say, in effect, "I will ignore the Divine claims a while longer! I will love, and live in, sin a while longer! I will trample upon the Saviour's blood a while longer! I will grieve the Holy Spirit of God a while longer! I will wring the hearts and disappoint the hopes of pious friends a while longer!" How desperate such a resolution! Its language is, "I will defer my repentance till I have less power to repent; till, by doing continued despite to the Spirit of grace, I am given over to 'a reprobate mind,'* and abandoned to my 'own deceivings;'+ till, in a word, my repentance becomes insuperably difficult, or impossible." The following fact, with its comment, illustrates my meaning:—

"On a part of the British coast, where beetling cliffs, from three to five hundred feet in height, overhang the ocean, some individuals, during a certain season of the year, obtain a solitary livelihood by collecting the eggs of the rock-birds, and gathering samphire. The way in which they pursue this hazardous calling is as follows: The man drives an iron crowbar securely into the ground,

* Rom. i. 28.

† 2 Peter ii. 13.

about a yard from the edge of the precipice. To that crowbar he makes fast a rope, of which he then lays hold. He next glides gently over the cliff, and lowers himself till he reaches the ledges and crags where he expects to find the objects of his pursuit. To gain these places is sometimes a difficult task ; and when they fall within the perpendicular, the only method of accomplishing it is for the adventurer to swing in the air till, by dexterous management, he can so balance himself as to reach the spot on which he wishes to descend. A basket made for the purpose, and strapp'd between the shoulders, contains the fruit of his labour ; and when he has filled that basket. or has failed ~~in~~ the attempt, he ascends, hand over hand, to the summit. On one occasion, a man who was thus employed, in gaining a narrow ledge of rock which was overhung by the higher portion of the cliff, secured his footing, but let go the rope. He at once perceived his peril. No one could come to his rescue, or even hear his cries. The fearful alternative immediately flashed on his mind,—it was being starved to death where he stood, or dashed in pieces four hundred feet below. On turning round, he saw the rope he had quitted, but it was

far away. As it swung backwards and forwards, its long vibrations testified the mighty effort by which he had reached the deplorable predicament in which he stood. He looked at that rope in agony. He had gazed but a little while, when he noticed that every movement was shorter than the one preceding, so that each time it came, as it was gradually subsiding to its point of rest, it was a little further off than it had been the time before. He briefly reasoned thus: 'That rope is my only chance of life. In a little while it will be for ever beyond my reach. It is nearer now than it will ever be again. I can but die. Here goes.' So saying, he sprang from the cliff as the rope was next approaching, caught it in his grasp, and went home rejoicing.

"Sinner! you tremble at this incident. Believe me, yours is greater peril! Beneath you yawns the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Stand where you are you cannot. Time will force you thence. Salvation is set before you. It is nearer now than ever it will be again. Lay hold of it. Cling to it with the firmness of a death-grasp. This is your only chance of safety. And it is not a chance alone. It is a certainty, a glorious certainty; and the only danger is that,

refusing to embrace it, you will defer escape until it becomes impossible. Then make that plunge at once. Beneath are the everlasting arms.”*

Compliance with this counsel is essential to your highest welfare, even in time. To come out fully and promptly on the Lord’s side,† is to have Him on your side.‡ And it is in strict accordance with the Divine command: “To-DAY if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart.”§ And who ever hardened himself against God and prospered?|| Instead, therefore, of halting longer between two opinions, “choose you THIS DAY whom ye will serve.”¶

* Damascus, by Rev. D. E. Ford, pp. 116—118.

† Exod. xxxii. 26. ‡ Ps. cxviii. 6. § Ps. xcv. 7, 8.

|| Job ix. 4. ¶ Josh. xxiv. 15.

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